LOCALISING THE GLOBAL: THE USE OF A POSTMODERNIST AESTHETIC IN THE FICTION OF ALAIN MABANCKOU

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of a postmodernist aesthetic in Alain Mabanckou's oeuvre, namely *Blue White Red*, *African Psycho*, *Broken Glass*, *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, *Black Bazaar*, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*. In particular, I show how and why this Afrodiasporic author localises strategies associated with Western postmodernist writing in an African postcolonial context. My central argument is that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context. In mounting this argument, I conduct a close reading of Mabanckou's novels from within the theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and postcolonialism. I demonstrate that Mabanckou's writing adumbrates the possibility of a postcolonial postmodernism. Since he is a French-Congolese citizen, his writing evinces aesthetic glocalisation. That is, as a postcolonial writer, he conceives of, and inflects, postmodernism differently from a Western writer, for his experiences of and responses to modernity differ from the latter's. Far from replicating a politics of disillusionment and despair that informs, even characterises, Western postmodernist fiction, Mabanckou invests his African postcolonial writing with a politics of decolonisation which problematises the effects of enforced modernity. Postmodernism, in other words, accords Mabanckou an ambivalent position from which he interrogates both Western modernity and its African version. Significantly, in this regard, Mabanckou's writing presents both an extension of and a departure from the pioneering influence of the first generation of African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wole Soyinka.

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Introduction: Postmodernism in an African Postcolonial Context

In the study that follows, I set out to explore the use of a postmodernist aesthetic in Alain Mabanckou's oeuvre, namely *Blue White Red* (1998), *African Psycho* (2003), *Broken Glass* (2005), *Memoirs of a Porcupine* (2006), *Black Bazaar* (2009), *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* (2010), *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* (2013), and *Black Moses* (2017). Mabanckou is an Afrodiasporic writer from the Republic of Congo and all his novels are translated from French. While acknowledging the inevitable loss of some original material in the translation process, it is not the focus of this study to dwell on such slippages nor on a politics of hermeneutics that accompanies this practice. Rather, the study is grounded in the conviction that the English versions of these eight novels sufficiently meet the methodological demands of my analysis.

In particular, I focus on the deployment of a postmodernist aesthetic in a postcolonial context and the socio-political implications of this mode of writing. I intend to show how and why Mabanckou's diasporic status enables him to localise strategies associated with Western postmodernist writing in an African postcolonial context. My main contention is that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in an African postcolonial context. In my understanding, modernity – understood as the radical intellectual, political, and economic upheavals from the early Enlightenment onward – is a global phenomenon which continues to generate far-reaching geopolitical consequences from one nation-state to another. In this understanding, postmodernism is itself a response to modernity.

Mabanckou's Africanisation of Western postmodernist techniques presents both an extension of and a departure from the first generation of the continent's literature. Importantly, in this regard, Mabanckou's writing reflects an emerging engagement with glocalisation which, in postcolonial studies, is a term that refers to a power dynamic that inheres in, and thus underpins,

the relationship between the local and the global, especially in the cultural sphere. Indeed, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, glocalisation derives from the semantic combination of the words 'global' and 'local,' and foregrounds the agency of local individuals and societies against "a seemingly relentless global culture" in ways that enforce reciprocity (131). For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, glocalisation indicates "transcultural relationships" between colonies and imperial centres, thereby lending credence to their argument that "the impact of colonial incursion was not simply one way, oppressive and hierarchical but reciprocal, transcultural and eventually transformative," as is evident in "the capacity of postcolonial literatures to appropriate the language, forms and genres of English literature" (131). By implication, then, African postcolonial fiction evinces a complex syncretism of both local and global aesthetics.

More importantly, the transcultural nature of glocalisation informs Achille Mbembe's description of a postcolony as an age or a *Zeitgeist* and, more precisely, his critique of the linear and racialised conception of African history and societies in various discourses of social theory. In his work entitled *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe makes a telling point that the history of African societies is rooted "in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualized outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized" (9). In developing this point, Mbembe draws attention to how, from the 1400s, African history has been inextricably embedded in the history of slave trade and colonialism, implying that to account for the continent's social formations is to critically delve into Eurocentric history and its related discourses (9). What Mbembe here calls into question is the binary opposition between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism, especially how the two discourses come to bear on the identity of a postcolonial subject. From this anti-binarist perspective, Mbembe defines the African postcolony

as an age that "encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*" (14), or what he also calls "an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones" (16; emphasis in original).

One encounters evidence of this cultural and temporal entanglement in the history of the African novel itself. In *The Novel in Africa and the Caribbean since 1950*, Simon Gikandi points out that the novel was the dominant and privileged genre during the first decade of African decolonisation in the late 1960s because of its "capacity to mediate the tension between so-called tradition and modernity" through the literary tradition of social realism (xv, xvi, xxiii). A telling irony in this context is that although early African writers were anti-colonialist in their orientation, they attended colonial schools and adopted the Western tradition of realism for nationalism and decolonisation purposes. Moreover, the second generation of African writers in the post-independence epoch, such as the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah and the Zimbabwean Dambudzo Marechera, appropriated a modernist aesthetic, while the current postcolonial generation employs techniques associated with Western postmodernist writing.

Implicit in this transcultural context is the development of African postcolonial writing in shifting entanglements of traditions that transcend national boundaries. In the past, African literature, according to Mabanckou and Dominic Thomas (1), was traditionally bound up and aligned with nationalist contexts in resisting colonialism and post-independence misrule. In the present postcolonial age, however, African literature encompasses transnational contexts and global aesthetics that, as Gerald Gaylard notes, indicate new pursuits of writing and reading trends that go beyond nationalism and social realism ("Mastering Arachnophobia" 85). Indeed, it is in recognition of such a glocalisation impulse that Kwame Anthony Appiah's description of African

postcolonial literature as postnativist and *transnational* rather than *nationalist* is understood (155; emphasis in original).

This aesthetic shift can be ascribed to the cultural dialogues and exchanges which glocalisation initiates. That is, as diverse cultures interact, they tend to share their artistic values in the process. Accordingly, contemporary Francophone sub-Saharan African writers evince a cosmopolitan and nomadic attitude which locates their works beyond nationalist boundaries in order to reach a universal audience (see, for example, Ducournau 49). Similarly, Valerie K. Orlando has noted that 21st century Francophone sub-Saharan African literature notably foregrounds the glocalisation dynamic in both form and content (1). In this regard, African literature accords with Homi K. Bhabha's argument in *The Location of Culture* that "it is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond* […] in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1; emphasis in original). The implication, of course, is that glocalisation does not merely bring African postcolonial writers into contact with Western literary traditions, but, more importantly, with the ideological underpinnings of such foreign aesthetic practices as well.

Quite tellingly, Bhabha's theorisation of culture evokes and provides a critique of the concept of hybridity. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, hybridity, in postcolonial discourse, "refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (135). However, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin further contend, the use of the term hybridity "to mean simply cross-cultural exchange […] has been widely criticized, since it usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references" (136). In other words, since hybridity is a complex process that occurs in what Bhabha

calls the "Third Space" between two different cultures (37), the essentialist conception of transcultural products becomes problematic:

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. […] the Third Space […] ensure[s] that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (37)

The contradictory and ambivalent nature of the Third Space means that the distinction between African postcolonial cultures and their Western counterparts is blurred, that their relationship is in a constant flux, thereby producing impure identities with no essential features whatsoever. It is in this anti-essentialist context that Bhabha can be brought into conversation with Mbembe's idea of cultural entanglement and, in particular, the latter's contention that "African social formations are not necessarily converging toward a single point, trend, or cycle, [for] they harbor the possibility of a variety of trajectories neither convergent nor divergent but interlocked, paradoxical" (16).

The critique of the essentialist conception of hybridity has a crucial bearing on various theories and practices of decolonisation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define decolonisation as "the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power" in both its hidden and unhidden forms (73). While the notion of decolonisation emphasises the binary opposition between local and Western cultures, it exposes how postcolonial subjects are inherently implicated in the imperialist value systems they seek to dismantle. In problematising these binarist tendencies, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin reveal that "the first nationalists were also modernizers, whose program was

less to effect a rejection of colonialist culture than to adopt its practices" and, in the process, became complicit with "the imperial powers from which they sought to emerge as free agents" (74). If, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue further, "political independence did not necessarily mean a wholesale freeing of the colonized from colonialist values" (74), then the identity of a postcolonial subject perpetually vacillates between the local and the global.

Revathi Krishnaswamy refers to exactly this type of postcolonial writer and critic in her account of migrant politics:

> A new type of 'Third World' intellectual, cross-pollinated by postmodernism and postcolonialism, has arrived: a migrant who, having dispensed with territorial affiliations, travels unencumbered through the cultures of the world bearing only the burden of a unique yet representative sensibility that refracts the fragmented and contingent condition of both postmodernity and postcoloniality. (125)

As emerges from this passage, the socio-political orientation of a migrant writer or critic is shaped, and thus informed, by the theoretical and ideological overlap of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Differently put, postcolonial writers and critics occupy the liminal space between indigenous and Western cultures, from which it is possible to appropriate a postmodernist aesthetic in order to address both local and global socio-political exigencies.

Not surprisingly, then, African postcolonial literature is now characterised by genres that combine local and global aesthetics. As Mabanckou and Thomas point out, there is a steady rise of a new generation of African writers that subscribes to self-conscious avant-gardist experimentation (2). Indeed, Evan Mwangi, in his article entitled "Experimental Fictions," confirms that, since the 1980s, African writers have been experimenting with narrative techniques which critique problematic aspects of both postcolonial and Western cultures (443). Some of these

experiments, argues Mwangi, include the blurring of the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, the use of spatial and temporal narrative strategies, protean characterisation, and metafiction (443).

Unlike their predecessors whose preoccupations, according to Gikandi, were "the recuperation of the African image [and] taking stock of a dying colonialism" (xxiii), contemporary writers are cosmopolitan rather than Afrocentric in both sentiment and aesthetic practice. Tellingly, in this regard, Mabanckou, in his article entitled "Immigration, *Litterature-Monde*, and Universality," states that:

> We have now moved, however, from a literature campaigning to recover an identity – the pioneering Negritude movement – to an introspective literature concerned with the condition of Black people around the world: a new generation of writers divided between 'neo-Negritude' on the one hand and caustic commentary on the mores of Blacks caught up in globalisation on the other. (75)

Emphasising the transformation of African literature in terms of its aesthetic underpinnings, Mabanckou reveals how the shift in thematic focus engenders or necessitates a corresponding shift in formal practice. One consequence of this transition, as Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo contends, is the emergence of a new type of experimental novel that employs deconstructive devices of Western postmodernist writing, namely irony, play, and parody (330).

The experimental impulse of postmodernism proceeds from the modernist break with the realist tradition both in the West and in postcolonial Africa. Writers like Ezra Pound and T.S. Elliot resorted to experimental ways of expressing disillusionment with the catastrophic effects of the First World War, for realism as a dominant mode of the Enlightenment tradition had become aesthetically and ideologically obsolete. Similarly, modernist experimentation enabled African writers to articulate their disenchantment with the crisis of post-independence governance and the

privileged status of social realism in decolonisation and nationalist politics (see, for example, Gikandi xxiv; Mwangi 448).

As a successor of modernism, then, African postmodernism also interrogates the representational claims of realism. Importantly, Appiah notes that early African novels were realist legitimations of nationalism, but, from the late 1960s onwards, they became postrealist, since the betrayal of independence promised by the continent's first generation of leaders had ushered in perennial problems like corruption, dictatorship, and poverty (150). For Appiah, the fact that postmodernism is also postrealist means that the second generation of African novels not only reject and subvert conventions of realism, but also use strategies associated with Western postmodernist writing in order to critique the disruptive effects of enforced modernity (150).

Since the late 1900s, African literature has been characterised by what Gaylard describes as a proliferation of non-realisms like gothic fiction, romance, science fiction, fantasy, horror, postmodernist fiction, and magical realism (*After Colonialism* 34). It is within this postrealist context that debates about the overlap of Western postmodernism and African postcolonial writing are progressively gaining critical attention. Much of this attention, however, remains theoretical. Only seldom do we witness a textual treatment of African postcolonial writing that proceeds from a postmodernist perspective. Even then, especially when a specific author is cited, the discussion is neither particularly comprehensive nor analytical. So, for instance, Imran Ahmad equates avant-garde features in the fiction of Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, Bessie Head, and J.M. Coetzee with a postmodernist aesthetic and yet does not conduct a postmodernist analysis to support his assertion. (141). Moreover, Ahmad claims that Coetzee's fiction adopts various postmodernist devices and strategies (152), but does not specify or investigate them.

Focusing on linguistic experimentation and innovation in Mabanckou's fiction, Thomas similarly translates its avant-gardist features into a postmodernist aesthetic ("The World of Alain Mabanckou" 71), but does not elaborate or interrogate its textual manifestations. Likewise, Phillip Amangoua Atcha's observations of a postmodernist aesthetic of "[d]iegetic incoherence, multiplication of intrigues, plurality of narrative voices, heterogeneity in forms, blending of genres, and intertextuality" in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*, while not incorrect, are limited in scope and intention (qtd. in Stemmers 108).

This thesis is concerned with situating Mabanckou's localisation of a postmodernist aesthetic within a more appropriate analytical purview that aligns him with African postmodernist writing. In an African context-specific focus that extends and modifies the critical analyses above, the thesis will examine to what end and to what effect Mabanckou's writing employs Western postmodernist techniques. To achieve this, the thesis will subject Mabanckou's eight novels to an in-depth close reading from within the theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Of particular relevance to my central argument is Linda Hutcheon's conceptualisation of postmodernism as a contradictory cultural enterprise that simultaneously installs and undermines the very concepts it seeks to interrogate (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 3). Since it is originally a Euro-American theory, postmodernism problematises Western modernity from within its liberal humanist and global capitalist assumptions and conventions. What is politically at stake here is what Hutcheon sees as postmodernism's paradoxical complicity with and critique of the dominant cultural conventions and ideologies of twentieth-century Western world (*Politics of Postmodernism* 11-12). For Hutcheon, the contradictory and paradoxical nature of postmodernism derives from the fact that:

> it knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within. History, the individual self, the relation of language to its referents and of texts to other texts – these are some of the notions which, at various moments, have appeared as 'natural' or unproblematically common-sensical. And these are what get interrogated. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* xiii)

In this passage, Hutcheon shows that postmodernism is premised on a deconstructive logic as opposed to a binarist one. This deconstructive impulse, as she argues further, proceeds from the fact that postmodernism works within the very systems it attempts to subvert by using and abusing their own assumptions (1, 4). For Hutcheon, this critical flexibility renders postmodernism a problematising force that calls into question what is considered natural and given in Western culture, but is itself provisional and context-bound (xi-ii). Postmodernism, it would seem to follow, suggests that although culture is a necessary construction of our experiences of the world, it is embedded with ideological certainties which can be interrogated from within.

Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism as an immanent critique of Western modernity is rooted in the linguistic turn of the 1960s and the resulting crisis of representation, both of which are influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics. Saussure argues that language is an independent system that constitutes reality without human agency, thereby refuting and undermining the epistemological certainties of Western modernity which are based on the positivist notion of the referential function of language in representing what is held to be a priori reality. It is from this anti-humanist perspective that poststructuralism and postmodernism interrogate liberal humanism and global capitalism from within their assumptions and practices. Hans Bertens tracks this theoretical overlap as follows:

> In the course of the 1970s, postmodernism was gradually drawn into a poststructuralist orbit. In a first phase, it was primarily associated with the deconstructionist practices that took their inspiration from the poststructuralism of the later Roland Barthes, and more in particular, of Jacques Derrida […]. Accepting Derrida's exposure, and rejection, of the metaphysical premises – the transcendent signifier – upon which such empiricism is built, postmodernism gives up on language's representational function and follows poststructuralism in the idea that language constitutes, rather than reflects, the world, and that knowledge is therefore always distorted by language, that is, by the historical circumstances and the specific environment in which it arises. (*Idea of Postmodern* 5-6)

Jean-François Lyotard elaborates on the basic point here – namely that postmodernism, like poststructuralism, is an anti-foundationalist theory. In his seminal work entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard defines postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarrative" (xxiv). Extending Lyotard's influential definition, Callum G. Brown, in *Postmodernism for Historians*, argues that the two core principles of postmodernism are that reality is unrepresentable but constructed and that if this is the case, then no single authoritative account of anything is tenable (7).

It is for this reason that postmodernism interrogates the metanarratives of liberal humanism and global capitalism, which derive from the Enlightenment tradition. According to Stuart Sim, postmodernism problematises Western modernity because, instead of fulfilling economic and political emancipation through the grand narratives of reason and science, it ended up oppressing humankind (vii). A similar critique of the contradictions of Western modernity emerges in Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In particular, the two neo-Marxist critics argue that the Enlightenment project is premised on capitalist foundations, whose

instrumental rationality has caused various human catastrophes across the world (3). Some of these disasters, according to Jim Powell, include rationally justified death camps, death squads, Auschwitz, World Wars I and II, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, ecological disaster, and various systems of totalitarianism (10). What Powell overlooks, however, is the global nature of these totalitarian systems, as is evident in Brown's revelation that postmodernism criticises modernity for promoting social elitism, patriarchy, racial and religious prejudice, capitalism, environmental degradation, and Western imperialism (24).

What I find theoretically and politically significant in Brown's criticism of modernity is the inference that both postmodernism and postcolonialism critique Western imperialism and its effects. Crucially, in this regard, Hutcheon argues that, although postmodernism lacks the distinct political agenda and relatively stable conception of agency that characterises postcolonialism, the two theories critique Western modernity from within by using strategies such as irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity ("Downspout of Empire" 168, 183). Likewise, Simon During, in his discussion of the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism, observes that while the latter is associated with Anglo-American modernity, it nevertheless exists as an embedded critique of liberal humanism and global capitalism (32). It is in this context that I mount my central argument, that is, if, as Hutcheon argues, postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West (*Poetics of Postmodernism* xiii), then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context.

What this ideological overlap adumbrates is the possibility of a postcolonial postmodernism, a possibility which lies in the fact that the grand narratives of Western modernity did not only enable and legitimate colonialism, but also later formed the foundations of neocolonialism. As Arif Dirlik maintains, postmodernism critiques such master narratives by

exposing their ideological role in Western imperialism (ix, xi). More importantly, F. Abiola Irele argues that Africa's present political and economic problems are, in large measure, a manifestation of adjusting to a Western-imposed modernity against which nationalism became the first decolonisation step ("Political Kingdom" 11). Here, Tejumola Olaniyan even argues that Africa partly owes its independence from colonial rule to postmodernism's epistemological self-reflexivity which challenged the Western world to rethink its liberal humanist values and see the error and the hypocrisy of its modernity claims (*Anthology of African Literature* 641). Postmodernism, in other words, exposes the fact that colonialism was not the civilising mission it purported to be, but a contradiction of the Enlightenment ideals of reason and human freedom. Of course, although Olaniyan admits that decolonisation is far from complete, he celebrates the global audience that African voices are commanding in a manner that would have been unthinkable to the Eurocentric imagination before 1945 (641).

Moreover, as Chantal Zabus argues, the reception of postmodernism in Africa was mediated by the dominant discourse of postcolonialism and its concomitant techniques of abrogation ("Postmodernism in African Literature" 463), which are also considered Euro-American in origin. It is therefore not surprising that postcolonialism and postmodernism are relevant to African decolonisation and, in this regard, Zine Magubane has asserted that:

> postmodernism and postcolonial studies have the potential to be profoundly enriched by their engagement with African realities, historical and contemporary [because their] characteristic features – a suspicion toward totalizing or 'grand' narratives; the desire to 'decenter' the West; and the focus on fragmentation, ambivalence, and contingency – were a constitutive part of the experience of Africa's engagement with [Western] modernity. (vii)

Racism constitutes the focal point for Africa's critique of modernity because it is an ideological foundation of Western imperialism in both its colonial and neo-colonial forms. According to Olaniyan, Africa has historically been the victim of Western racism which presents the continent as uncivilised, without history, and barbaric (639). Likewise, V.Y. Mudimbe and Chinua Achebe make a telling point that colonialism was based on a binarist logic which set up Africa as a foil to Europe, as the antithesis of the West and therefore of civilisation (*Invention of Africa* 17; "Image of Africa" 2). Since African postcolonial subjects are inheritors of both indigenous and Western values, decolonisation evinces a racialised dimension, especially theories and practices which privilege the local over the global, rather than affirming the cultural entanglement and reciprocity that the two realms engender.

Arguing for its cultural, philosophical, literary, and historical antecedents, Kenzo likewise views postmodernism as ideologically relevant to the African postcolonial condition (323-24). However, in conflating postmodernism and negritude in his "quest for a peculiarly African *episteme*" (327; emphasis in original), Kenzo problematically contradicts postmodernism's anti-totalitarian and anti-binarist tenets. Indeed, as Hutcheon points out, postmodernism is politically ambivalent because it critiques the cultural dominants within which it inescapably exists, rather than deny or replace them with other cultural dominants ("Downspout of Empire" 168). The fault-line in Kenzo's logic, then, is that, in valorising African cultures through negritude, he is caught up in a totalising practice which reverses the binary opposition of Western cultures over African cultures.

This misreading of African postmodernism is evidenced also in Denis Ekpo's essay titled "Towards a post-Africanism: Contemporary African Thought and Postmodernism." In it, Ekpo's proposition that postmodernism be appropriated for the continent's political enhancement belies,

through binary reinforcement, its deconstructive premise (133). As William H. Thornton notices, the problem with this strategy is that, in placing emphasis on cynicism, it essentialises postmodernism in an un-postmodernist manner since some of its elements are neither cynical nor politically effective (108). Paradoxically, though, Thornton's preference for what he calls "postmodern realism" is equally problematic because postmodernism, as already noted, is a critique of the representational claims of realism (111). In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, Bran Nicol makes precisely this point by defining postmodernism as an incredulity towards realism (19). Nonetheless, both Ekpo and Thornton acknowledge the theoretical overlap between postcolonialism and postmodernism, especially in relation to African socio-political realities.

It is within this theoretical dialogue that a glocalised form of postmodernist and postcolonial writing emerges. Nicol calls this glocalised aesthetic "postmodern-postcolonial writing," and argues that it is characterised by the deployment of postmodernist strategies in postcolonial fiction in order to facilitate the critique of Western imperialism (122-23). Eric Sellin adds that postmodernism has a postcolonial subdivision that designates Third World writing as counter-discourse and parody (469). The overlap between postmodernist and postcolonial fiction is also evident in what Helen Tiffin sees as their paradoxical break with modernist poetics:

> In various ways, both discourses share a problematic political relationship with modernism. Post-modernism constituted as a period term determinedly rejects, while it paradoxically reinscribes modernism. Post-colonialism […] derives in part from the spread of European modernist texts and contexts to colonial areas, and post-colonial responses to modernism are necessarily linked to it, even as post-colonials point out the partial geneses of both

> modernism and post-modernism in the European encounter with 'other' cultures. (*Past the Last Post* viii)

As already noted, early African novels in English borrowed a modernist aesthetic that accompanied colonial education. As David I. Ker notes, modernism's experimentation provided early African novelists with formal and thematic means to address their own local socio-political concerns which arose out of the colonial encounter (1). Indeed, Ker contends that the transition from modernism to postmodernism in the West adumbrates a corresponding transition from modernism to postmodernism in postcolonial Africa, and this is related to postmodernism's and postcolonialism's paradoxical break with literary realism (1).

The similarity between postmodernist and postcolonial writing can also be seen in their formal features and thematic concerns. According to Tiffin, the two forms of writing share certain indistinguishable conventions, devices, and techniques (*Past the Last Post* x), while Ato Quayson indicates that postmodernism and postcolonialism might be conflated in common thematic, rhetorical, and strategic concerns, especially regarding questions of marginality ("Postcolonialism and Postmodernism" 88). By way of example, magical realism – with its characteristic mixing of the fantastic and the realist – has been highlighted by commentators as evidence of the convergence of postmodernist and postcolonial fiction (see, for example, Hutcheon "Downspout of Empire" 169). Where Hutcheon and Kenzo underscore the shared formal techniques of irony, allegory, play, and parody, Quayson associates magical realism with a suspicion towards metanarratives of Western modernity, nationalist historiography, and literary realism (168; 330; 88). Nevertheless, in all cases, postmodernist and postcolonial fiction evince postrealist features and a similar critique of Western modernity.

Tellingly, these ideological and aesthetic overlaps effectively undermine arguments that do not acknowledge the socio-political relevance of postmodernism to African postcolonial studies due to its Western origin. For example, Arun P. Mukherjee argues that both postmodernism and postcolonialism are totalising in nature because they assimilate and homogenise non-Western texts within a Eurocentric cultural economy (1). Ironically, though, Stephen Slemon has pointed out that postmodernism and postcolonialism have different ideological and theoretical assumptions (1). Whatever their ideological differences and similarities, postmodernism and postcolonialism are generally resisted in non-Western spaces precisely because of their Western origin, which is thought to invest them with imperialistic intentions. However, Albert J. Paolini associates this resistance with postmodernism's apolitical nature, rather than with its Western provenance:

> It is not so much that because of these [Western] origins the postmodern is not able to provide insights into non-Western societies but, as many critics have noted, that postmodernism proceeds from a peculiarly Western experience of disillusionment with modernity that may not be appropriate to societies that are still coming to terms with modernity and its challenge to tradition and the premodern. Thus, the politics that often accompanies this disillusionment (ranging from nihilism to a retreat from conventional political action) may not provide effective or relevant strategies to people and movements attempting to navigate a different set of demands and opportunities provided by modernity. (99)

The point here is that postmodernism is associated with a politics of Western despair and disillusionment that may be irrelevant to the decolonisation project in postcolonial societies. Seen from this perspective, postmodernism, as previously noted by Hutcheon, lacks a concrete political agenda and a theory of agency. It is for this reason that critics of postmodernism argue that even

though it critiques hegemonic discourses, it is part and parcel of Western imperialism and ultimately apolitical since it does not feed into larger projects of emancipation (see Quayson, *Postcolonialism* 132).

At issue here is the persistent question of postmodernism's socio-political relevance to African postcolonial literature and, particularly, to Mabanckou's writing. This study will show that, far from replicating postmodernism's politics of disillusionment and despair, Mabanckou invests his writing with a politics of decolonisation which problematises the effects of Western modernity. As I have already pointed out, Mabanckou is an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity grants him access to both Western literary traditions and their ideological underpinnings. However, he conceives of such traditions differently from Western writers, for, his experiences of and responses to modernity as an African postcolonial writer differ from theirs. What this means is that Mabanckou necessarily inflects postmodernism differently by deploying its strategies in the African postcolonial context in order to achieve concrete socio-political goals.

By implication, then, Mabanckou performs a postmodernist critique of both Western modernity and its African extension. In doing so, he shows that African postmodernism, like its Western predecessor, is characterised by what Hutcheon calls a "resolutely contradictory" and "unavoidably political" nature, or a "commitment to doubleness, or duplicity" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 1). In other words, postmodernism accords Mabanckou an ambivalent position from which he interrogates Western and African modernity from within their assumptions and practices. In fact, in the 2012 interview with Helen Stevenson, he describes himself as a politically ambivalent writer, who criticises both the West and Africa for their shared contribution to slave trade, racism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (16).

This thesis elaborates on Kumkum Sangari's argument that postcolonial writing fulfills the politics of the possible, that is, the political fusion of local and global aesthetics. In his article entitled "The Politics of the Possible," Sangari contends that the non-realist writing of the postcolonial world opens itself up to postmodernist analysis and that this conjuncture makes possible the political conflation of the two literary traditions in their common critique of Western modernity (157-58). This is the political possibility that Appiah frames as an ethical responsibility that African postcolonial writers need to recover within postmodernism's apolitical critique of Western modernity (155).

Postmodernism's critique of Western modernity and its accompanying imperialistic upheavals refutes another common argument that this theory is ahistorical, which is advanced by Fredric Jameson's often-referenced work, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. As the title indicates, Jameson takes postmodernism to be the cultural logic of late capitalism by which he means that it is complicit with the ideological and economic dominants of Western modernity. In Marxist terms, he thus describes postmodernism as "the consumption of sheer commodification," which proceeds from a profound "loss of historicity" in mass culture (x). Jameson's point is that since postmodernism exists in an age that lacks critical historical awareness of class struggle and economic exploitation, it presents itself as a willing agent of global capitalism which can be traced back to early Western modernity (ix).

Different postcolonial critics have taken up Jameson's Marxist critique of postmodernism in order to articulate the identity politics of decolonisation. One of these critics is Tiffin who argues that postmodernism is irrelevant to postcolonial politics because its apolitical nature does not contribute to the dismantling, demystification, and unmasking of Western imperialism which are essential political and cultural strategies towards decolonisation and the retrieval or creation of an

independent identity ("Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and Post-Colonial History" 170). Similarly, Paul T. Zeleza accuses postmodernism and postcolonialism of undermining African decolonisation because of their Western provenance, stressing that the two theories work to homogenise and dehistoricise the continent (1, 24). It is within this anti-imperialistic context that During sees postcolonial subjects engaging in the struggle to create an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images, which have been intentionally constructed to wipe out the possibility of such an identity in the first place (33, 43).

To argue along these lines, however, is to miss the ironic point that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, it must also be a response to the marginalisation of African history and identity. Moreover, as I have previously argued, decolonisation is itself subject to glocalisation forces, which render history and identity contradictory and ambivalent entities. Precisely this entangled nature of postcolonial identity and history is what Sangari captures below:

> The history of the West and the history of the non-West are now irrevocably different and irrevocably shared. Both have shaped and have been shaped by each other in specific and specifiable ways. The linear time of the West or the project of modernity did not simply mummify or overlay the indigenous times of colonized countries, but was itself open to alteration and reentered into discrete cultural combinations […]. The cultural projects of *both* the West and the non-West are implicated in a larger history. (185-86; emphasis in original)

The suggestion in this passage is that the colonial encounter between the West and non-West generated socio-political conditions that problematise the construction of a unitary or an uncontaminated identity or history because they are perpetually contaminated by glocalisation. This explains why postmodernist-postcolonial fiction concerns itself with the writing of history

because it is not only the chief ideological means of imprisoning subjects in a subordinate socio-political position through art, media, or other cultural representational practices, but because it is also a way by which the colonised can resist, subvert, or critique the colonial process (see Nicol 121, 123).

Similarly, Dirlik acknowledges the paradoxical nature of postmodernist historicism when he argues that:

> One of the fundamental contributions of postmodernism – indeed a defining feature of postmodernity – is the questioning of the teleology of the modern, and of other teleologies imbedded in economic, political and cultural narratives that have constituted the idea of the modern; so that it becomes possible once again to conceive the past not merely as a route to the present, but as a source of alternative historical trajectories that had to be suppressed so that the present could become a possibility. While this questioning has opened up new possibilities in understanding the past, and has been equally important in opening up the past as a reservoir of multiple political possibilities, it has not eliminated therefore the forces that constituted modernity historically which persist as a burden of the past over the present. (3)

What is here suggested is the fact that postmodernism does not only interrogate the historical *telos* of Western modernity, but also how this *telos* still shapes the present in ways that simultaneously provide and suppress alternative histories and futures. Postmodernism, in other words, installs and undermines the history of Western modernity from within its *telos*.

As I will show with reference to Mabanckou's writing, African postmodernism employs a similar parodic irony in order to problematise binarist conceptions of identity and history. Indeed, Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is characterised by a critical or ironic rethinking of history,

rather than its nostalgic recuperation (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 4). If, as Appiah contends, postmodernism interrogates the legitimating metanarratives of Western modernity (155), then it must also be politically relevant to the critique of enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context.

This study, then, proceeds to explore Mabanckou's political ambivalence towards different aspects of Western and African modernity. It demonstrates that, as an Afrodiasporic writer, Mabanckou's glocalised identity enables him not only to appropriate strategies associated with Western postmodernist writing, but also to use them in problematising the destabilising effects of enforced modernity. The study also shows that, since Western postmodernism lacks a theory of agency that enables political action, Mabanckou inflects it differently from Western writers by investing it with a politics of decolonisation. African postmodernism thus becomes a complex combination of Western postmodernist techniques and postcolonial politics, which, acting in concert, simultaneously installs and subverts assumptions and practices of the local and the global from within.

As I proceed, it will become clear that Mabanckou's postmodernist-postcolonial writing evinces what Edward W. Said, in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, calls critical consciousness, by which he means that an intellectual's identity is inherently a worldly one and that it involves a critical interrogation of those aspects of a culture that require unquestioning affirmation and orthodox compliancy from its members (24). Crucially, in this connection, Olaniyan argues that such a critical self-consciousness is one of the characteristics of African postmodernism:

> The related postmodern suspicion of all self-authorizing claims and agendas makes entrenched modes of resistance in Africa such as 'anti-imperialism,' 'anti-neocolonisation,' and the like, seriously suspect. […] it is possible to reject grand narratives

> and still be anti-imperialist. The salutary effect of postmodernism in this regard is that it has desacralized African counter-grand narratives, such as nationalism and anti-imperialism, and shown that they can be no repressive, politically and epistemologically, than the Western grand narratives they oppose. The atrocities committed in the last 30 years by many African leaders in the name of the sacredness of the nation are still part of our contemporary history. What good a postmodern suspicion of the truth-claims can do for us in this instance is to entrench a critical self-consciousness that is the enemy of all passions that would present themselves as unimpeachable. (*Anthology of African Literature* 640)

Mabanckou's writing evinces precisely this critical self-consciousness by constantly interrogating both Western and African cultures, rather than simply affirming their assumptions and conventions.

In fact, in his interview with Stevenson, Mabanckou explains that, as an African postcolonial writer, he is inevitably politically engaged, but in an ambivalent way that criticises both the West and Africa and that he expresses these political opinions through his characters (16). It is noteworthy, in this regard, that the reader of Mabanckou's writing repeatedly encounters surrogate authors, who, in metafictional terms, double as narrators and protagonists in the fictional world. Through them, the reader comes to see that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in Mabanckou's African postcolonial writing. Having introduced my argument, I proceed not only to trace the ways in which postmodernism plays out in Mabanckou's writing, but also how the writing itself starts an endless process of localising the global, as outlined in the chapter overview that follows.

This study has four core chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. Chapter one examines how Mabanckou employs self-reflexive strategies of metalepsis and intertextuality in

Broken Glass and *Black Bazaar* in order to perform a postmodernist critique of the representational claims of colonialism. In developing this argument, I show how Mabanckou, through his surrogate authors, undermines Eurocentric history by suggesting that narrative is not a natural representation of the real world, but a linguistic construct, and is therefore liable to interrogation. I also argue that the racialised representation of Africans that accompanied colonialism elicited Afrocentric discourses, which are also racialised in nature. Since Mabanckou is politically ambivalent towards both Western and African modernity, he simultaneously installs and subverts the racial assumptions within Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. I elaborate on this point by referring to his metafictional presentation of both white and black characters who display racial prejudice. Thereafter, I conclude by contending that Mabanckou's self-reflexive writing gestures towards multicultural tolerance as one possible way of achieving some form of coexistence beyond the violence of racism.

Chapter two focuses on Mabanckou's presentation of the psychological fragmentation of the protagonists of *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*: Massala-Massala and Grégoire Nabomakoyo respectively. My contention is that, in the two novels, Mabanckou enacts a postmodernist critique of the psychological effects of both the French immigration legislation and the Congolese foster care system. In this regard, I show that Massala-Massala's migrant experiences in Paris and Grégoire's traumatic childhood in the Congolese city of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot render their subjectivity a flux of personalities. In other words, the two protagonists display conflicting personalities, and so their selfhood and, indeed, their self-perception is always in a process of perpetual deferment, uncertainty, instability, and indeterminacy. In a related context, I also contend that such a recurring fragmentation of subjectivity undermines the agency of the two protagonists, since they constantly fail to deal with

the modern city conditions that shape their identity. I then conclude by noting that Mabanckou's diasporic status as a French-Congolese writer grants him an ambivalent position between French and Congolese cultures from within which he simultaneously inscribes and undermines their social, political, and economic assumptions and practices.

Chapter three traces Mabanckou's narrative experimentation with run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, and how this mode of writing articulates the possibility of an African postmodernism. I argue that narrative experimentation enables Mabanckou to mount a postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism. Proceeding from this premise, I show how run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs infuse French (and English) with a disruptive Congolese vernacular accent, which ultimately subverts their colonial imposition. The ontological effect of this perpetual tension is that even though the reader sees French (and English) words on the pages, he or she constantly perceives the fictional projection of the phonetic and syntactical traces of Congolese languages. By way of conclusion, I maintain that narrative experimentation does not only recuperate the subordinated Congolese accent, but also reveal that, for all their universal supremacy, European languages are prone to subversive modification. I also conclude by acknowledging Mabanckou's postmodernist contribution to the language debate in African literature, which is based on the question of whether African literature should be written in European or indigenous languages. I argue that, in situating his narrative experimentation between the two conflicting positions, Mabanckou demonstrates a postmodernist ambivalence towards both local and European languages.

The final chapter revisits Mabanckou's use of self-reflexive strategies, but from the perspective of his autobiographical writing. It explores how the representation of his authorial self in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* makes him not only the

reader of his real life, but also its writer. My argument is that, in the three novels, Mabanckou performs a postmodernist critique of the disruptive effects of Western modernity on both his fictional and real life, as well as on the collective existence of his extended family and friends. In elaborating this argument, I show that self-reflexive strategies do not simply function as postmodernist exercises in collapsing the ontological divide between real life and fiction, but rather problematise the impact of enforced modernity on Mabanckou's interpersonal relationships from which his identity proceeds. I also argue that the form of these three novels departs quite pointedly from that of their African predecessors because Mabanckou incorporates self-reflexive techniques that are associated with Western postmodernist writing. Rather than employ realist strategies, which do not acknowledge their narrative constructedness, he draws attention to the writing process itself. I end this chapter by asserting that self-reflexivity confers a rare critical flexibility on the three novels, which enables Mabanckou to criticise his parents, his extended family, his fellow Afrodiasporic subjects, his French and American asylum providers, and even himself.

Chapter One: Self-Reflexivity in *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*

In a 2012 interview, Mabanckou explains to Helen Stevenson that he incorporated almost 250 references to other African, European, and American novels in *Broken Glass*, a task that prompted him to invent a widely-read surrogate author, who doubles as a protagonist and a narrator in the fictional world (12). Moreover, the novel also evinces references to poems, plays, comic strips, films, paintings, sculptures, philosophy, and the Bible. Although Mabanckou limits the self-reflexive dimension of his writing to *Broken Glass*, it nevertheless extends to *Black Bazaar* because this novel contains similar, sometimes even identical, intertextual references and an equally well-read surrogate author, who also doubles as a protagonist and a narrator in the fictional world. Not surprisingly, then, *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* evince metafictional overlaps both in form and content.

While Mabanckou's commentary on his own writing reveals the self-reflexive nature of the two novels, it does not explain the socio-political relevance of using this strategy, which is associated with Western postmodernist writing. In this regard, his self-reflexive writing seems to lack what Edward W. Said, as previously noted, describes as critical consciousness, by which he means that any text is inherently a worldly one and that, while it "may appear to deny" its materiality, it cannot be divorced from the socio-political context within which it exists (4). For Said, such a critical consciousness is always situated, sceptical, secular, and reflectively open to its own limitations, not in a value-free manner, but in a way that arrives at some acute sense of what socio-political values are entailed in the reading, production, and transmission of every text (26). In other words, to construct a text, as Mabanckou does, is to make a political statement, whether explicitly or implicitly.

My argument, though, is that Mabanckou's critical consciousness is situated in the ideological orientation of his surrogate authors. In *Broken Glass*, the surrogate author is the eponymous narrator, a 62-year-old alcoholic and former primary school teacher from the Congolese town of Trois-Cents, who spends time in a bar called Credit Gone West recording the life stories of the customers in a notebook after being persuaded to do so by the proprietor and his best friend, the Stubborn Snail. The surrogate author of *Black Bazaar* is an unnamed Congolese migrant, who, as the title indicates, relates the experiences of black people in the part of Paris that is populated mainly by non-French citizens. This chapter aims to demonstrate how and why the two surrogate authors politicise the self-reflexive techniques of metalepsis and intertextuality on Mabanckou's behalf.

Significantly, Evan Maina Mwangi historicises the development of African self-reflexive writing in his study aptly entitled *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*. He argues that although self-reflexivity is grounded in the non-realist impulse of postmodernism, it is a global aesthetic practice (5-6). In particular, Mwangi points out that Africa's history of written fiction, especially from the mid-1980s onwards, is characterised by novels that draw attention not only to their own textuality as artistic artefacts, but also to their intertextual relationship to other novels (1,7). More importantly, Mwangi makes a telling point that, in the current African postcolonial context, self-reflexive novels mark a stylistic shift from realist to non-realist writing (1). By implication, then, if self-reflexivity is a glocalised aesthetic practice that is rooted in postmodernism, which is itself a critique of the representational claims of realism, African postcolonial novels inevitably evince a postmodernist inflection. However, the deployment of self-reflexivity in African postcolonial novels, mainly the more contemporary ones, has not received much critical attention that acknowledges the possibility of an African postmodernism.

What is at stake in this possibility is the simultaneous conjuncture and disjuncture between African and Western postmodernism. As I maintain throughout this thesis, Mabanckou's glocalised identity allows him to employ self-reflexivity differently from Western writers due to contrasting experiences of and responses to modernity. In this chapter, I shall show that although Mabanckou utilises typical postmodernist strategies such as metalepsis and intertextuality, he invests them with a politics of African decolonisation which critiques the effects of enforced modernity.

Indeed, Mabanckou's use of metalepsis and intertextuality in *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* bears comparison with Mwangi's contention that African postcolonial writers deploy self-reflexivity as a critique of gritty and emerging socio-political realities, rather than as a form of narcissistic wordplay (ix, 2). Just such a socio-political *telos* of self-reflexivity constitutes one of the premises of my central argument in this study, namely that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then the same critique must also be applicable to enforced modernity and its disruptive effects in the African postcolonial context.

I part ways with Mwangi, though, when he proposes a reading of African self-reflexive novels as primarily writing back to themselves and to one another in order to address local socio-political concerns, and not back to the colonial empire (ix, 2). This proposition, however informative, glosses over the fact that African problems cannot be understood outside the context of colonialism, since its enforcement introduced new problems that aggravated old local ones. Given the steady persistence of these problems, it is not surprising that Mwangi contradicts himself by later acknowledging the enduring influence of colonialism in contemporary Africa when he emphasises that self-reflexive fiction should be read not as exclusively writing back to the

metropolis, but more meaningfully as writing back to itself in order to respond to issues such as AIDS, sex, and gender alongside the classical theme of Western imperialism (x-xi).

What I nonetheless find useful in this contradiction is Mwangi's idea of self-critique, that is, when African self-reflexive novels write back to themselves and to each other, they expose the continent's internal contribution to its own problems, rather than exclusively ascribing them to the external influence of Western imperialism (2). Importantly, the notion of self-critique problematises the binarist conception of African identity and history. As earlier argued, African postcolonial subjects inhabit the liminal space between the local and the global in which identity and history become different yet shared. It follows that the ambivalent and contradictory nature of glocalisation enables African postcolonial writers to appropriate self-reflexive techniques associated with postmodernist writing in order to critique effects of both Western modernity and its enforced version, which is what I will demonstrate to be the case in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*.

Glocalisation, then, calls into question the binarist representation of culture. Since different cultures interpret reality differently, representation becomes a site of constant ideological conflict. According to Bran Nicol, representation, particularly in its narrative form, relies on metanarratives or smaller-scale rhetorical myths, which form one of the principal means by which a dominant group within society can impose its values upon those it subjugates (123). However, as Callum G. Brown argues, postmodernism is premised on the core principle that while representation is a necessary expression of our experience of the world, it is nevertheless a subjective act, for reality cannot be mirrored as it is, but merely as it is mediated by "human-constructed words, sounds, pictures and images" (7). For this reason, African postmodernism interrogates the representational discourses of both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism.

My contention in this chapter, then, is that Mabanckou employs metalepsis and intertextuality in *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* as a critique of the representational claims of colonialism, especially its Eurocentric history and assumptions. In developing this argument, I shall show how Mabanckou, through his surrogate authors, enacts a postmodernist-postcolonial incredulity towards what Arif Dirlik calls the master-narratives of Western modernity in their colonial and global capitalist manifestations (56). In particular, I will trace moments of metalepsis and intertextuality in the two novels in order to demonstrate how these metafictional strategies undermine colonialism by suggesting that narrative is not a natural representation of the real world, but a human construct, and is hence subject to critique.

As I have previously mentioned, Mabanckou's writing presents an ambivalent critique of what V.Y. Mudimbe calls a dichotomising structure of colonialism (17). In *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe argues that the representational discourses of colonialism are premised on a binarist logic that presupposes the superiority of Europe over the inferiority of Africa by presenting the former as civilised and the latter as primitive (17). Such a racial prejudice, argues Chinua Achebe in "An Image of Africa," proceeds from the desire in Western psychology to set up Africa as "an antithesis to Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (2).

In exposing and refuting the racialised foundations of colonialism, Mudimbe's and Achebe's arguments point to what Tiffin has described as counter-discourses, which involve the radical dismantling of Eurocentric discourses and their representational codes ("Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse" 17). I shall show, however, that these counter-discourses do not acknowledge the contribution of African subjects to colonial racism and subjugation. Proceeding from this premise, I shall discuss Mabanckou's presentation of white and black

characters in a manner that installs and then subverts the racial assumptions of both Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. Thereafter, I will conclude by contending that Mabanckou's self-reflexive writing in *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* gestures towards multicultural tolerance as a way of achieving coexistence beyond the racialised confines of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses.

Moments of Metalepsis

As a concept, metalepsis derives from the classical theory and practice of representing reality, particularly from Plato's distinction between mimesis and diegesis. While the meaning of mimesis still centres around the idea of imitation, the meaning of diegesis slightly varies from its classical conception. According to H. Porter Abbott in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Plato used diegesis to mean stories that were told and not acted, but in recent times the term has come to refer to the world created by the act of narration itself (68, 189). Although this semantic shift indicates that prose fiction is diegetic in nature, the question that remains is what exactly constitutes metalepsis and why it is that Mabanckou employs it.

In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as the transition from one narrative level to another through the very act of narration in a text (234), or what we might describe as the art of narrating a story within another story. From this narratological perspective, Genette establishes two main diegetic levels in relation to the narrator's point of view. He calls the first level extradiegetic, meaning the narrator is situated outside a primary narrative and the second one metadiegetic, meaning the narrator is within a story he or she is narrating (228). For Genette, then, metalepsis is achieved through the intrusion of the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe or the infiltration of diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe (234-35). Genette further argues that metalepsis generates a defamiliarising effect

because the transgression of diegetic levels defies the notion of verisimilitude between the world in which one tells and the world of which one tells (236), which is a central tenet of realism in its attempt to generate a mimetic illusion that the fictional world is a replica of the real one.

To the extent that postmodernism has strong affinities with non-realism, metalepsis disrupts the mimetic illusion through the narrator's constant transgression of the ontological boundary between the real world and the fictional world. Given this non-mimetic dimension, postmodernist fiction, contends Nicol, is characterised by a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the text's own status as a constructed artefact, a critique of the representational claims of realism, and a tendency to draw the reader's attention to his or her own process of interpreting a text (xvi). In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale similarly argues that postmodernist texts exploit the metaleptic logic of violating the hierarchy of narrative levels in order to foreground the ontological dimension of the recursive embedding of fictional worlds (119-20).

At the outset of *Broken Glass*, for instance, Broken Glass advertises the novel's fictionality by revealing that the Stubborn Snail has given him a "notebook to fill" (1), which effectively suggests that the novel *Broken Glass* is his notebook, which is now in the hands of the reader. We read that, following Broken Glass's joke about a "famous writer who drank like a fish" (1), the Stubborn Snail persuades him to write the notebook, believing that he, being a teacher and a fiction enthusiast, also possesses writing skills. Whilst the Stubborn Snail hopes to preserve his bar's memory through the notebook, Broken Glass uses it to expose its own fictionality and, in a metaleptic short-circuiting of levels of ontology, that of the novel itself. Through this metalepsis, the novel thus demonstrates that there is again an ontological difference between the notebook, which is in the fictional world, and the novel, which is a book in history.

Likewise, in *Black Bazaar*, the narrator overtly refers to the fictionality of his diary, which he is writing in order to deal with the disappointment of being abandoned by his ex-lover whom he nicknames Original Colour. In its prologue, he explains that Roger the French-Ivorian, his fellow regular at an Afro-Cuban bar called Jip's, has heard from Paul that he is writing a diary entitled *Black Bazaar* on a typewriter at home. Roger specifically informs the narrator that "Paul from the big Congo tells me you're writing this and that it is called *Black Bazaar*" (7). Here, again, the short-circuiting of the ontological divide between text and history generates the metafictional illusion that the writing in the novel is the writing of the novel. Quite literally, the novel is writing about writing. The text is writing about itself, its own ontogenesis or coming into being, rather than simply mirroring extra-textual reality.

At this point, readers experience *mise-en-abyme* which, according to McHale, is the inscription of a fictional world within another fictional world (125). McHale further argues that *mise-en-abyme*, while not exclusive to postmodernist writing, is another form of short-circuit, another transgression of the logic of diegetic levels, which, as a result, reinforces the metaleptic foregrounding of the ontological dimension of recursive fictional worlds (125). In the metaleptic context of Mabanckou's novels, *mise-en-abyme* manifests itself in the infinite inscription of the notebook into *Broken Glass* and the diary into *Black Bazaar*. The implication is that although the notebook and the diary occupy a secondary diegetic level as opposed to the primary diegetic level of *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* within which they are embedded, they still resemble, indeed even duplicate, the ontological structures of these novels. If the notebook and the diary are carbon copies of *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* respectively, then it follows that the surrogate authors are writing fiction that replicates itself, and not merely extra-textual reality, or, to put it differently, they are writing stories that are within stories.

In both *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*, then, metalepsis takes the form of a diegetic contract between the surrogate authors and the characters they invent within the fictional worlds of the two novels. It is in this sense that Mabanckou's surrogate authors strikingly resemble typical postmodernist characters, who, according to McHale, are agents or carriers of metalepsis because they are not only aware of their own fictionality, but also of their short-circuiting effect on the ontological boundary between the two fictional worlds (121, 123). The surrogate authors and other characters thus exist at both extradiegetic and metadiegetic levels, thereby perpetually transgressing the ontological boundary between the two fictional words.

Apart from Broken Glass, the other character who exhibits an awareness of being fictionalised in the notebook is the Printer, one of the drunkards at Credit Gone West, who owned a printing company in France before being deported back to Congo. Having learnt that Broken Glass is writing a notebook about the bar's customers, he demands inclusion in it as a character (36). Another drunkard who calls attention to his fictional status is the Pampers guy, who, as his nickname announces, wears baby pampers to cover up his oozing bottom after being sodomised in jail. After allowing Broken Glass to include his life story in the notebook, he later changes his mind and demands that it should be deleted, accusing the narrator of being "the liar," who "write[s] all kinds of stuff about people" (148). Holden, a new white member of the bar and a former student in America, also demands a place in Broken Glass's notebook as a character (152). By demanding to be characters in the notebook when they are also characters in the novel itself, these characters unsettle the ontological configurations of both the notebook and the novel. They live extra-diegetic lives, stepping in and out of the two intersecting fictional worlds.

Like Broken Glass, the narrator in *Black Bazaar* confesses to turning people around him into witting or unwitting characters in his diary. So, for instance, he notifies Roger that he has

invented “a character who plays tom-toms,” and that he has “nicknamed him the Hybrid” (13). The Hybrid’s ‘real’ name is Lucien Mitori, who elopes with Original Colour and the narrator’s daughter, Henriette, to Congo. In fact, it is Mitori’s ensuing hatred that exacts the following metafictional confession from the narrator: “Nothing can curb my desire to express myself, to write in this diary what I feel about him deep down” (125). Similarly, after narrating the family history of his ex-girlfriend, the narrator informs the reader that henceforth in the diary he will call her Original Colour in order to emphasise her extremely dark complexion (61). Although Mitori and Original Colour are apparently unaware of their inscription in the narrator’s diary, the reader knows that they inhabit overlapping fictional worlds whose diegetic parameters are constantly undergoing destabilisation.

Other characters, though, flaunt their fictionality because they know that the narrator is incorporating them into his diary. Like the Pampers guy in *Broken Glass*, Roger warns the narrator to “make sure” he does not find his name in the diary (14). In not wanting to be fictionalised in the diary, Roger, ironically, betrays his fictionality awareness. Here, the reader experiences ontological disorientation because, in reading the novel, he or she encounters two Rogers who occupy two different but intertwined fictional planes: one in *Black Bazaar* and the other in the diary within *Black Bazaar*, which is effectively *Black Bazaar* in its metafictional ontogenesis. Sarah, a half-French half-Belgian painter whom the narrator marries in the novel’s epilogue, also draws attention to her own fictionality and that of Original Colour, the narrator’s French-born Congolese ex-girlfriend, when, on reading the narrator’s “description of Original Colour[’s] dark skin,” she wonders if he has described her white skin as “also an original colour?” (263). At this juncture, one also experiences ontological dissonance, for Sarah is exposing her fictionality in *Black Bazaar* which is the narrator’s diary in the process of becoming *Black Bazaar*.

Since glocalisation constitutes a power dynamic between the local and the global, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* invest metalepsis with a politics of decolonisation. The two novels, unlike their Western postmodernist counterparts, do not simply draw attention to their own metaleptic devices, but rather use them to probe the implications of the colonial encounter between Africa and Europe in terms of not only the interplay between local and foreign values, but also of their respective representation.

In doing so, Mabanckou's novels call to mind Marcel Cornis-Pope's argument that self-reflexivity, rather than a formal gimmick, serves the ideological function of resisting and challenging traditional constructions of reality and the false claims to stability of referential discourses by exposing their mythic content and underlying symbols (257). What the reader encounters in the two novels, then, is not so much what Patricia Waugh describes as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (*Metafiction* 2), or what Linda Hutcheon calls "fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 1), but instead a metafictional critique of the representational claims of both Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses.

To the extent that these oppositional discourses are products of the colonial encounter between Europe and Africa, they are shaped, and thus informed, by the conflicting histories of the two continents and the racial tensions that accompany them. On the one hand, Western imperialism exploits the narrative nature of history by constructing racial discourses that are designed to reinforce and justify the social, political, and economic subjugation of Africans. On the other hand, Africans draw on their indigenous narratives for decolonisation purposes. In both cases, history serves a significant ideological function which exposes the constructedness of both colonial and anti-colonial discourses. History, in other words, involves the construction of a system of

statements that represents a subjective worldview and, in the process, reveals the provisionality of any representational claim.

As with postmodernist texts which, according to Hutcheon, are characterised by an ironic dialogue with and a critical rethinking of history (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 4-5), Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* simultaneously install and subvert Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses by presenting characters who display racial prejudice. Indeed, Mabanckou's treatment of racism in the two novels draws on Frantz Fanon's argument, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that blacks desire to be white when whites regard themselves as superior to blacks, thereby precluding any possibility of racial equality and coexistence (3). What is ironic, though, is the fact that, in desiring to be white, blacks expose their inferiority complex, rather than attaining racial equality with whites, while whites, in denying blacks racial equality, undermine their collective identity, which depends on acknowledging the alterity of blacks. In exposing these race-related contradictions, *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* present black and white characters who, as glocalised subjects, are caught up in the paradox of simultaneously affirming and denying their own racial prejudices.

In *Broken Glass*, these racial contradictions feature prominently in the social relations of the Printer, who, before his deportation to Congo, used to run a printing company and married a French woman named Céline. We are told that he demands to be included as a character in Broken Glass's notebook, arguing that he is "more important than" the other characters because he has been to France (37). He even warns the narrator that if he is not included in the notebook "it won't be worth the paper it's written on" (37). Although Broken Glass ultimately includes the Printer in the notebook which, in a metaleptic short-circuiting of diegetic levels, happens to be the novel

Broken Glass, he does so in order to refute the racialised claim that France is "the height of achievement," and that those who go there are "always going to be right" (37).

What the reader witnesses here is Mabanckou's political ambivalence towards French assimilation policies and Congolese migration, for both systems reinforce racial stereotypes. As a Congolese diasporic subject himself, Mabanckou suggests that, while the assimilation policies grant access to French culture and identity, the country's immigration legislation and citizens subject African migrants to racial discrimination which induces identity crises. Exactly such an identity crisis emerges when the Printer contradicts himself by stating that he both hates and does not hate France (37). His identity crisis assumes greater racial proportions when he indicates that the very thought of France makes him "want to vomit," and expresses this revulsion by spitting on the ground (37). Ironically, however, he goes on to claim that his rightful place is in France, and not in his native Republic of Congo (38).

In Mabanckou's novel, the Printer is also forced to conform to the racial stereotype of a wealthy black man in France, as becomes evident in his self-description to Broken Glass:

> I was a decent man, I don't know if you understand what's meant by a decent man in France, but I was a man who earned his living, a man who paid his income tax on time, a man with a post office savings account, a man who even had shares on the stock exchange in Paris, a man who was saving for his pension in France – because pensions in this country are nothing but a pile of shit, a road to ruin […] I was somebody in the black community back there, people knew me. (38)

From this description, it is clear that a 'decent man' in France is extremely rich regardless of race. However, when the Printer indicates that he is saving his pension in France, rather than in Congo, the implication is that it is more prestigious to be associated with French whiteness than Congolese

blackness. More tellingly, the same civil and entrepreneurial obligations assume different levels of respectability across the two racial divides, which is why he would rather be a black man in France than in Congo. There, he would be closer to whiteness and, through it, gain the visibility of a 'civilised' man.

Since the Printer cannot detect and interrogate the racialised assumptions and images that are attached to the notion of blackness, he ends up internalising them. The implication is that his sense of self keeps oscillating between a white superiority complex and a black inferiority complex and the two irreconcilable extremes, acting in concert, render him ontologically fragmented. In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*, this form of fragmented subjectivity unfolds in the Printer's business experiences:

> I didn't just hire negroes either, because […] there's more to life than negroes, for fuck's sake, there are other races too, negroes don't have a monopoly on misery, or unemployment, I also hired miserable, unemployed people with white skin, and yellow skin, I mixed them all up together […] I had real status, and not every black gets to hire and fire white men, who, after all, were the ones who colonized them, Christianized them, flung them into the holds of ships, whipped them and trampled them, burned their gods, put down their rebellions, wiped out their empires, so I hired people with white skin and people with yellow skin, and I mixed them together with the other wretched of the earth, and there weren't many Negroes doing that. (39)

As this passage indicates, the Printer has an ambivalent relationship with his fellow blacks and whites, for, as he argues, both races, despite their long history of slavery and colonialism, share similar problems such as poverty. He supports his argument by claiming that he employed people from different racial origins in his printing company. Here, the Printer effectively refutes

Eurocentric discourses that represent blacks, particularly Africans, as poor. While this stereotype certainly applies to most Africans, Europeans, however less, are also victims of poverty. Paradoxically, though, in reiterating his economic status as a rare rich black man in France, the Printer reverses, and so reinstates, the Eurocentric discourse he earlier subverted and, in the process, affirms the racialised image of Africans as poor.

As a glocalised text, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* acknowledges the ideological power that racial discourses exert on the identity of both blacks and whites, but, at the same time, exposes the mimetic fallacies of these discourses. In doing so, Mabanckou's novel demonstrates both the ontological influence and ideological unnaturalness of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses, as becomes further evident in the interaction between the Printer and his prospective parents-in-law:

> Céline quickly talked her parents round, they're not racists [...] and they said I was a fine young man, distinguished, intelligent, refined, ambitious […] and I was pleased to hear this description of my noble qualities, they admired the way I dressed […] they also said how they loved deepest Africa, the real Africa, mysterious Africa, the bush, the red earth, the wild animals skipping about in the wide open spaces, adding that only fools thought that black Africa was heading for disaster, or that Africa was antidevelopment and they apologized personally for the mistakes of the past, in particular for the slave trade, colonization, the problems with independence and all the other shit some black fundamentalists have made their thing, I didn't want to get into those worn-out arguments, I made it clear to them that stuff to do with the past was not my thing. (41-2)

Tellingly, the fact that Céline persuades her parents to meet the Printer suggests their disapproval of a black son-in-law, which is clearly racialised although he denies it. What is even more ironic is that his denial is also a form of racial prejudice, as it is motivated by the stereotypical

acknowledgment of his status as a wealthy man. Quite simply, Céline's parents tolerate him because he is rich. However, their true racial feelings about him overtly emerge in their patronising attitude and the derogatory statements about Africa, which are informed by ethnocentric and anthropological discourses. As Mudimbe argues, Western imperialism is profoundly informed by the reports of explorers, who, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, spread myths about Africa's primitiveness and barbarity (33). Achebe similarly observes that, from the colonial days to the present, Western discourses represent Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity (*Hopes and Impediments* 8). In dismissing the refutation of these racial discourses as black fundamentalism and worn-out arguments, the Printer hopes to gain the approval of his prospective parents-in-law, not knowing that, in doing so, he not only reinforces these racial stereotypes, but also internalises them further.

Not surprisingly, then, Céline's father takes advantage of the Printer's racial prejudice by openly justifying the French colonisation of Congo. He even celebrates the historical fact that General de Gaulle "declared Brazzaville the capital of Free France during the occupation" and that it is the "land of dreams and freedom" (42). A telling irony, of course, is that French colonialism precluded Congo's freedom. Evidently, Céline's father undermines the very racial discourses he seeks to install, as also emerges when he claims that Congolese people "speak the purest French," and yet, as Mabanckou explains to Binyavanga Wainaina in the 2010 interview, France accuses its former colonial subjects of speaking French with an accent (42; 35). Moreover, Céline's mother exposes her husband's racial contradictions by asking him to stop referring to Congo as a French colony or territory because the two terms are interchangeable (42). What is at work here is Mabanckou's postmodernist de-naturalisation of French colonial discourses from within their racial assumptions.

Indeed, as an inheritor of both French and Congolese cultures, Mabanckou also de-naturalises the Printer's racial assumptions about inter-racial marriages. We read that when he finally marries Céline, they choose to stay in a place that is "well away from negroes" because, unlike whites, they are "the worst enem[ies] of mixed-race couples" (43-44). Although the Printer denies that his detachment from fellow blacks is not influenced by racial prejudice, the following confession proves that it is, in fact:

> if other negroes see you with a white woman they think they can get off with her too, they think if a normal sane white woman is shacked up with some gorilla from the Congo, she might as well get shacked up with the whole wildlife park, the entire reservation […] I'm not here to rub salt into the open wounds of my race, my race is what it is [...] ours was the best of lives […] even if mean-mouthed blacks back in Paris were always saying black–white couples never last long […] it will only last if the black guy gives up being black […] if he keeps his black skin but wears a white mask […] I didn't need to wear a white mask to hide my black skin, I was actually proud of my black culture […] Céline respected me for that. (44)

The Printer's confession calls to mind Fanon's psychiatric study of the relationship between a black man and a white woman and, in particular, his contention that the black man's desire for whiteness compels him to love a white woman because her love makes him feel like a white man, thereby accessing the white culture which is normally denied to him (45). As Fanon further contends, such men are alienated from their black identity, especially from other black men whom they suspect of being competitors for white women (88). In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*, this self-alienation becomes apparent when the Printer reduces himself and other black men to the animal level. Indeed, the more he denies endorsing the racial prejudice against his black race and culture

the more he accepts it, as is ironically clear when he reveals that Céline respects him for his inferiority complex and his contempt for other blacks (46).

Because the Printer's racial prejudice is blatantly visible, it attracts condemnation from both blacks and whites, even from his own mixed-raced son whose mother is a West Indian woman and whom he later catches in bed with Céline. The Printer informs us that this son despises him and calls him a slave to Céline, which is, in fact, confirmed by his confession that he does not "keep a tight rein on her" because a black man does not "mess with a white woman's personal freedom" (46). Again, even though he denies being a racist, his reaction to his son's revelation that he has "seen Céline with some local Africans" is influenced by racial prejudice: "It's not hard to catch a white woman who's two-timing you with a negro, you just have to say something insulting about Africa and negroes, that all negroes are starving, mud-hut-dwelling idle good-for-nothings with their civil wars and their machete brawls" (46-7). Moreover, the narrator maintains that he is "justified" in describing his black race in such stereotypical terms (47).

By contrast, Broken Glass includes in his notebook a character called Mouyeké, a local fly-by-night herbalist and an occasional customer of Credit Gone West who criticises racial prejudice in Christianity. So, for instance, he informs his fellow drunkards at the bar that Christ's miracles "are completely unverifiable" and that the missionaries have used them to brainwash Africa since the colonial days (75). To illustrate his point, Mouyeké refers to the Bible itself:

> my dear friends and negroes, why is it, do you think, that in the Bible all angels are whites […] they might at least put one or two black angels there, just to butter up the negroes here on earth who refuse to alter their condition on the grounds that the Almighty got their skin color wrong, so there are no black angels in Holy Scripture, and if one or two blacks ever crop up in it, it's always squeezed in between a couple of satanic verses, often they're

> devils, or very minor characters, and there were no blacks among Jesus's disciples either […] are we supposed to believe that at the time the Bible soap was running there was no black actor who could play a leading role […] but I do understand and forgive the poor whites, you can see why they saddled the negroes with the role of bootblack in daily life here below when from up on high you get the impression negroes don't even exist. (76-77)

The significance of Mouyeké's critique of the racial underpinnings of the Bible is that it exposes the role of Christianity in colonisation. Indeed, his comparison of the Bible to a soap opera suggests its constructedness as a system of Eurocentric discourses that represents blacks as naturally inferior to whites, thereby justifying their colonial subjugation. Paradoxically, though, in arguing that God gave blacks the wrong skin colour, he reinstates the racial stereotypes he is subverting. It is in this regard that Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* demonstrates its glocalisation impulse, for the novel foregrounds the entanglement of both Congolese and French citizens in racialised value systems, which, quite paradoxically, reinforce and undermine each other.

Like *Broken Glass*, *Black Bazaar* also performs the postmodernist critique of colonialism by presenting characters that either endorse or undermine racial discourses, as emerges in the novel's prologue. We read that the Congolese migrant narrator has had a nightmare in which the pygmies of Gabon (who, according to Congolese myth, have supernatural powers as ancestors of humanity) are about to sacrifice his daughter, Henriette, by cooking her in a pot. In pleading with the pygmies to spare her life, the narrator first accuses them of "putting humanity to shame," instead of showing "the whole world that cannibalism doesn't exist" in Africa and that "it was invented by explorers," and very tellingly adds, even "by those Africans who write books!" (5). In a manner typical of postmodernism, the narrator's accusation exposes the complicity of Africans in their own racial subjugation.

In *Black Bazaar*, Mabanckou's metafictional critique of colonialism extends to the reinforcement of the binary hierarchy of literacy over orality, as emerges when Roger the French-Ivorian confronts the narrator about the diary in the following way:

> Why are you writing? I suppose you think anyone can write stories, eh? [...] You must be realistic here! [...] There are smarter people for that, and you can see them on the telly […]. This is what they were born to do, they were brought up with it, but when it comes to us negroes, well then writing is not our thing. With us it is the oral traditions of our ancestors, we are tales from the bush and forest, the adventures of Leuk-the-Hare told to children around a fire crackling to the beat of the tom-tom. Our problem it is that we did not invent the printing press or the ballpoint pen, and we will always sit at the back of the classroom fantasying about how to write the history of the dark continent with our spears. (7)

Roger's racial prejudice underscores the binarist polarisation of literacy and orality that proceeds from the colonial encounter between European and African cultures. As F. Abiola Irele notes in his book entitled *The African Imagination*, the relationship between orality and literacy has of late been perceived more often as an opposition than a complementarity in ways that presuppose the superiority of the latter over the former (24). It is from this Eurocentric perspective that Roger associates Westerners with intelligence and technology as opposed to the primitiveness of African oral traditions. However, as Mabanckou argues, although African literature cannot avoid the influence of orality, it is a myth to think that the continent's writing has one oral basis, that it is merely a transposition of oral traditions, for this tendency precludes the exploration of cultural diversity ("Immigration, *Litterature-Monde*, and Universality" 86). In metafictional terms, then, Mabanckou foregrounds the intertwined or interlocked nature of African oral and Western literacy traditions, thereby undermining the racialised discourses of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism.

Similarly, Mabanckou's *Black Bazaar* calls into question the racial privileging of the French language over its Congolese version. We are told that Roger accuses the narrator of writing the diary with an accent like other African writers who use this European language and that the French people do not like it (7-8). As I later argue in chapter three, this is one of the contradictions of linguistic imperialism that Mabanckou's narrative experimentation problematises. More importantly, in the aforementioned essay, Mabanckou criticises France for treating African diasporic writers as ambassadors of a French culture that is itself hesitant to acknowledge them as part of its literary tradition, which leads to the convenient exoticisation of African cultures and languages (79-80; 85). That explains Roger's argument that, if he was a writer, he would be easily accepted by the French academy on account of his "mixed-race" heritage and light skin because these two factors give him "an important edge" over the narrator (8). Paradoxically, in this regard, both French citizens and Congolese migrants simultaneously acknowledge and deny their existence in the liminal space between the local and the global and, by extension, the cultural entanglement that abounds herein.

Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of colonialism also implies that, while this project of Western modernity has engendered various social, political, and economic disturbances around the world, African leaders have, since the independence impetus of the 1950s, also contributed to the continent's problems. In *Black Bazaar*, this political ambivalence becomes apparent when Roger and the narrator agree that African post-independence governments have failed to build on the technological benefits of colonialism such as official buildings and houses, electricity, railway lines, roads, safe drinking water, and town centres, thereby ushering in underdevelopment and poverty (9). Importantly, in this regard, Tejumola Olaniyan locates the socio-political relevance of postmodernism in its sustained interrogation of nationalist discourses, which demonstrates that

they are no less ideologically repressive than the Western grand narratives they purportedly oppose (*Postmodernism, Postcoloniality and African Studies* 44). That is, if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a reaction against enforced modernity and its disruptive effects in the African postcolonial context.

It follows that Mabanckou's *Black Bazaar* also problematises the representation of colonialism as a civilising mission, for it proceeds from the instrumental logic of Western modernity that advances global imperialism and capitalism. Exactly this ambivalent critique emerges when Roger claims that Africans "owe the settlers respect" for "delivering [them] from the darkness and bringing [them] civilisation," despite braving "mosquitoes, devils, sorcerers, cannibals and green mambas, sleeping sickness, yellow fever, blue fever, orange fever, and rainbow fever" in what he describes as the "ebony" and "ghostly" continent (10). As Achebe argues, however, especially with reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the discourse of the civilising mission represents one of the prevailing myths about Africa that was in circulation in Europe at the time of the imperial project (7).

Another character that endorses such myths in *Black Bazaar* is an old man the narrator nicknames Mr Hippocratic, who is a fellow tenant and neighbour in a Parisian flat complex. Like the Printer in *Broken Glass* and Roger, Mr Hippocratic, despite being a black man from Martinique, despises the black race, as is evident when he accuses the narrator as follows after falling on the steps: "Goddammit! I'm telling you an African laid a trap for me with a banana skin! And we're not talking about any old banana skin! That banana came directly from Africa!" (28). We are also told that when he gets angry, he accuses the narrator of harbouring African migrant criminals who print "fake money," sell drugs, and have homosexual orgies involving "wild

animals" (29-30). The irony, of course, is that Mr Hippocratic is also a black migrant and therefore a victim of the same racial abuse to which he subjects fellow black migrants.

As I argue in the second chapter, black migrants in France face a xenophobic immigration legislation which contradicts assimilation policies, and therefore encourages racism. It is within this context that Mr Hippocratic boasts to the narrator "how proud he is to be French by birth," and complains that the country "can no longer shelter all the destitute in the world, especially the Congolese who are forever turning up at the border" (31). Since he is a French-born black man, he openly supports the brutality of French colonialism (30). Later in the novel, he even applauds the cruelty of Belgians who "chopped hands and shaved people's heads because they could not tolerate fuzzy hair" (222).

What Mabanckou's *Black Bazaar* exposes here is the systematic propagation of this racial prejudice by the French mass media, as becomes clear when Mr Hippocratic hears on the national television that the Congolese people suffer from diseases, famine, have many wives, and are always fighting (32). These racial stereotypes become even clearer when he describes the plight of the Democratic Republic of Congo under the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa za Banga, whose long name sounds barbaric to him:

> the poor Congolese are all going to die of starvation or AIDS or because of tribal wars. […] I saw him on the telly giving a speech in a packed stadium. Apparently it was in the same stadium where he murdered and buried Patrice Lumumba. That Mobutu makes his people suffer, he is a villain, he is evil, he's a dictator, we should send in the Americans to do a spot of mopping up over there! That man brings shame on your race, it's intolerable! If I were an African I would rise up and go to fight against that dictator. Hasn't he ever

> heard of democracy, that president of yours? He sells your diamonds, he buys himself fancy homes in Europe, is that a normal way to behave? (32-3)

At issue in this passage is not only the projection of French racism through the country's mass media, but also the suggestion of black complicity. So, for example, Mr Hippocratic cites how Mobutu's dictatorship degrades the black race from the French perspective when he is also black. What is even more ironic is the fact that Mobutu's dictatorship and the murder of Lumumba were influenced, if not arranged, by the West. Moreover, if the Western powers really cared about African democracy, they would not destabilise Congo by masterminding civil wars in order to acquire diamonds, let alone allow Mobutu to keep stolen money and buy fancy homes in Europe.

Tellingly, in this regard, Mabanckou's *Black Bazaar* enacts a postmodernist critique of both Western and African modernity by exposing how the two social systems are premised on a similar instrumental logic of racism. In Mabanckou's novel, this paradoxical nature of enforced modernity unfolds in Mr Hippocratic's justification of colonialism and condemnation of the idea that Europe should pay reparations to Africa. He maintains that people who are not intellectually sophisticated "exaggerate the injustice done to Africans," and ignore the fact that colonialism was a gesture of "generosity" from "civilised people" who provided "aid for the small nations in darkness" and delivered "the savages" from their primitive life of "living in trees and scratching themselves with their toes" and cannibalism (221). What is more, Mr Hippocratic's rhetorical question "Is that a normal way to behave?" indicates the prevalence, and thus the supposed 'naturalness,' of these racial discourses in France (221). However, as I have already argued, postmodernist writing undermines the idea of narrative naturalness, for, by definition, a narrative is a human construct that is not natural and given, but a subjective interpretation of reality.

Within this postrealist context, Mabanckou similarly exposes the constructedness of Afrocentric discourses, as emerges when Mr Hippocratic claims that he is not against the narrator, but other "ungrateful" black people "who criticise colonisation" and "are seeking reparations for the losses" (220-21). In a metaleptic short-circuiting of the diegetic levels between the diary and the novel *Black Bazaar*, Mr Hippocratic's anger is, by implication, directed at Yves the just-Ivorian, another migrant character who advocates the idea of colonial reparations. In this regard, the latter proposes that, in retaliation for colonial injustices and racial discrimination, France should pay reparations and, if this is not fulfilled, African migrants should "bastardise" the country by marrying white women so that it is full of "mixed-race" children (98). From the postmodernist standpoint, however, Yves, in proposing this radical solution, is simply reversing the binary opposition between Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. Mabanckou's novel, it follows, inscribes and subverts the racial assumptions of the two opposing discourses at the same time.

Later in the novel, the narrator even sets the two discourses against each other, as is evident when Yves and his half-compatriot, Roger, quarrel over the racial heritage of baby Henriette after the narrator brings her to Jip's. Roger disagrees with Yves's suggestion that the narrator should have had a mixed-race child by reminding him that Africans "cooperated [in] and benefited from" French colonialism and that if he "were the Minister for Immigration and National Identity," he would have revoked his "resident's card" for being ungrateful (99). In retaliation, Yves accuses Roger of being a "white-negro" who betrayed Africans during "the days of slavery," and that when the French immigration system "is anti-Blacks he calls himself White, and when the Whites remind him that a half-caste is just another negro he rejoins the negro crowd!" (100). Although both accusations contain some truth, they are nonetheless racialised, since they are Eurocentric and

Afrocentric respectively. Both Yves and Roger, in other words, simultaneously install and subvert their glocalised identities and, by extension, of French citizens and of other African migrants.

Black Bazaar also problematises the role of French education in reinforcing racism, as becomes apparent in the identity arguments between the narrator and Original Colour. The narrator informs the reader that they "have big arguments" about what she takes to be "fixed truths on the subject" of the negro condition, when, in fact, they are "just clichés in black and white" (47). We are later told that, like Roger, she believes that Congolese ancestors are French (48). However, the narrator exposes her racial prejudice by arguing that the "blonde version of Tarzan she'd loved since she was a little girl" is not king of the African jungle, and that the depiction of negroes in *The Adventures of Tintin in the Congo* as having "big fat pink lips" is a gross misrepresentation, "even if certain history books at the time reported" that black people "hadn't quite completed the evolutionary process of turning from monkeys into men" (48). Since her racial prejudice is deeply internalised, Original Colour still quotes "those history books written by Whites between a couple of colonial expeditions and a few battles lost to Shaka Zulu" and maintains that Africans lived in "beaten earth huts [or] tree houses," practised black magic, and have, since then, suffered poverty, as illustrated by pictures of "children with distended bellies" (48). In response, the narrator denies that Africans lived "in that heart of darkness" by pointing out that "there are some Africans who have never seen" wild animals, including those who have only ever seen these animals "in the zoos of Europe" (48-9).

While the narrator's arguments refute these racial stereotypes, he later exposes his own racialised conception of identity. He tells us that, since Original Colour "was born in Nancy," she displays traits of identity alienation from her Congolese roots (46-7). Ironically, though, his description of her dark complexion is tellingly racialised:

> I had nicknamed her Original Colour on account of her very black skin. Back in the home country, we still believe that negroes born in France are less black than us. […] There are some people, when you see them, they're black as manganese or tar, so you figure they must have roasted under the tropical sun, but […] when they tell you they were born in France […] I insist they show me their identity card on the spot […] and if they are right, I get frustrated […] I'm thinking: what world are we living in if people are busy demolishing the little things that keep our prejudices alive, eh? [...] It shouldn't be allowed. It flies in the face of nature. (60)

As emerges in this passage, the narrator's racial awareness is conditioned by the traditional worldview that defines Congolese identity in relation to its closeness to French whiteness, that is, blacks born in France are expected to be less black than those born in Africa. This explains the narrator's frustration at encountering French-born Congolese people who are even blacker than those born in Africa, and is also why he ends up nicknaming his ex 'Original Colour'. While this nickname emphasises the blackness, and thus the original colour, of Africans, the narrator reinforces the racial discourses that tend to represent this colour as the product of undesirable weather conditions, as evidenced by his attribution of blackness to the humid conditions of the tropics. Moreover, his rhetorical question reiterates the need to maintain such racial prejudices, thereby undermining the transcultural reciprocity that exists between the local and the global from which he benefits as a Congolese migrant.

In Mabanckou's *Black Bazaar*, this postmodernist critique of identity also concerns itself with names, especially when another migrant character, Vladimir the Cameroonian, comments on the racial implications of Henriette's name. We read that although he understands the narrator's decision to name her after his grandmother, it is a name that is old, and therefore not normal, in

contemporary French society (97). According to Vladimir, the narrator should have "called her Jeanne, or Charlotte, or Odette, or Marie" because these names would have guaranteed her "a future" (97). What even worries Vladimir more, we are told, is the fact that Henriette "looks she will even be darker than her mother, who is already at the peak of negritude" (97). The mention of negritude evokes Mabanckou's argument in his essay that contemporary African writers evince a neo-negritude attitude in that they are no longer concerned with the essentialist recovery of an African identity, but with an introspective engagement with the glocalised condition of black people (76). In this regard, *Black Bazaar* shows that while it is important for Africans to be proud of their identity and culture, they must also acknowledge and respect other peoples' identities and cultures in ways that promote coexistence and diversity, not racial discrimination.

It is from this glocalisation perspective that Mabanckou's novel presents identity as a fragmented phenomenon which is always in a state of flux in response to changing cultural circumstances, as exemplified by the double consciousness of his fellow regular at Jip's, Bosco the Chadian lyrical poet, and his father. We read that Bosco "talks with a Parisian accent," but the more he pretends to be French the more Pierrot (a French regular at the bar) reminds him that he sounds like "a proper negro who is still in the process of being colonised" and has "got black skin and a white mask" (63). Similarly, the narrator tracks the split identity of his father whose "work as a houseboy for the Europeans in the town centre" back in Congo influences him to despise his fellow locals by, for example, labelling "old folks as Australopithecus" because of their supposed uncivilised nature (196). Because he believes in the superiority of white people, he accepts everything they say, even if presented with "evidence to the contrary," particularly if it comes from a black person (196). Ironically, however, he also believes that whites are different and that "some have a skin that makes you wonder if they even deserve to be whites" (196). Again, *Black Bazaar*

enacts the postmodernist critique of simultaneously installing the power of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses and then undermining their representational assumptions from within.

A similar presentation of double consciousness emerges when the novel exposes the influence of religion on identity, as becomes apparent in the attitude of an African-Arabic migrant called Djamal, who runs a shop near the narrator's studio apartment. We learn that he calls the narrator an "African brother" because they both come from "the continent of solidarity," as proclaimed by the "Enlightened Guide," Muammar Gaddafi, especially his idea of "African Unity" (108, 115). What is ironically racialised, though, is his argument that "the first man on earth was African" and that, for this reason, all the other races are immigrants here on earth and, even more importantly, that Europe "actually belongs to the Africans," and yet both black and Arabic Africans are the real immigrants in France (108-9). Moreover, he contradicts himself not only by complaining that people from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa "are strangers to one another," but also by denying Arabic involvement in slave trade and ascribing it only to the West (145). As noted already, and as Mr Hippocratic later argues in the novel, Arabs and even Africans colluded with whites during the slave trade (223). Indeed, although Djamal claims that "the West has force-fed [Africans] lies and bloated [them] with pestilence," the same accusation can be levelled against Africans (109).

Moments of Intertextuality

Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* also politicise representation by drawing attention to their intertextuality. As its name suggests, intertextuality is the theory and practice of incorporating in a literary text references to other literary and non-literary texts. To the extent that the two novels reference an array of biblical, literary, philosophical, comic, and filmic intertexts, Mabanckou's metafictional writing illustrates the glocalisation dynamic, for he borrows from both

African and Western texts. In this section, I shall focus on how and why Mabanckou deploys different forms of intertextuality such as imitation, parody, travesty, translation, adaptation, quotation, allusion, and transworld identity (see, for example, Broich 249; McHale 57). More importantly, I will demonstrate that Mabanckou's metafictional writing presents both a continuation of and a break with the traditional conception and practice of African intertextuality.

An instructive example here is Ode Ogede's work, entitled *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature*, in which he argues that African writers engage in creative dialogues that rewrite, interrogate, and revise the themes and techniques of each other's work (ix, x, xiii). Significantly, in this regard, Ogede claims that African intertextuality not only presents a shift of critical attention from the relationship between the continent's writers and their Western predecessors, but also contributes to the decolonisation of local culture and its literary canon (x, 8). Although Ogede focuses on the intra-African dimension of intertextuality, the decolonisation project, as already argued, is itself mediated by the entanglement of postcolonial subjects in both local and global values, an entanglement that brings the continent's writers in perpetual contact with the Western canon and the colonial discourses that accompany it.

In other words, intertextuality, by its very definition, cannot be confined to African writers, for this aesthetic practice cannot avoid the influence of other aesthetic practices from diverse cultural and ideological backgrounds. Moreover, what needs more critical attention is the socio-political relevance and implications of reading African intertextuality from the postmodernist perspective. As Ahmed Gamal argues, postcolonial metafiction is a narrative mode that accommodates the self-questioning ambiance of postmodernism and the political stance of postcolonialism (1). Not surprisingly, then, Mabanckou's glocalised identity allows his metafictional writing to simultaneously install and subvert Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses

and, in doing so, underscores the relevance of a postmodernist aesthetic to a postcolonial politics of decolonisation.

In referencing different texts, particularly areas of thematic or/and formal overlap, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* hold the mirror up to their own ontogenesis, and not simply to extra-textual reality, thereby disrupting the mimetic illusion of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. Thus understood, intertextuality challenges authorial originality, even identity. As Roland Barthes contends in "The Death of the Author," the author symbolically dies when he or she starts writing because the human self is replaced by the linguistic 'I' as the overall speaker (49-50). In "What is an Author," Michel Foucault correspondingly argues that writing creates a space into which the author perpetually disappears, or into which he or she assumes the status of a dead person (206-7).

The point here is that the traditional God-like image of the author as the origin of a text's signifying system transposes into the image of the author as the compiler of pre-existing linguistic and cultural codes. As a result, Barthes points out, a text becomes a multi-dimensional space or a fabric of quotations and several writings, which are recycled, rather than original (53), or what John Frow calls "a grid or a texture of significations, an intrication of heterogenous materials" (47). For this reason, Michael Worton and Judith Still, in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, maintain that "a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system" (1).

If a text, by definition, is open to intertexts, it becomes a polyphonic or a dialogic entity. Graham Allen, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, explains that words, written or spoken, possess within them what has already been said, meaning that the author enters a dialogue with already established diegetic codes and discourses in the writing process (*Roland*

Barthes 80). This preoccupation with textuality, however, is what renders some postmodernist writing apolitical and ahistorical, since, in privileging form over political content, such writing fails to interrogate the ideological dominants and effects of Western modernity, both locally and globally. By contrast, though, Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, identifies a different form of Western postmodernist writing which she calls historiographic metafiction. For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction problematises any naive realist concept of representation and any equally naive textualist or formalist assertion of the total separation of art from the world (125). In other words, historiographic metafictions draw attention not only towards their status as fictional artefacts, but also towards their ideological function as socio-political commentaries of the Western culture within which they are embedded.

It is this politically-orientated brand of Western postmodernist writing which Mabanckou localises, and inflects differently, in the African postcolonial context in order to critique the effects of enforced modernity. Mabanckou thus invests his self-reflexive writing with a politics of decolonisation that goes beyond the formalist foregrounding of intertextuality. It is in this regard that *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* come to serve not only as critiques of other texts, but also of their ideological underpinnings, thereby gaining a metacritical dimension. As James Currie rightly observes, metafiction is a form of writing which places itself in the ontological boundary between fiction and criticism, and which takes the blurring of that boundary as its subject matter (2). Indeed, as Mwangi notes, African metafictional novels collapse the distinction between creative and critical writing and between different genres and their modes of transmission through language, but in ways that serve concrete socio-political agendas (7).

In Mabanckou's novels, one such political agenda manifests itself in the interrogation of the representational claims of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric history. As glocalised texts,

Broken Glass and *Black Bazaar* show that both African and Western history are shaped and informed by the transcultural exchange that accompanies the colonial encounter, in which the perpetual entanglement of values precludes essentialist construction of identities. Tellingly, in this regard, the two novels call into question Gamal's assertion that postcolonial metafictional texts are characterised by their rewriting and recuperation of native history (1), for this argument overlooks the cultural entanglement of the local and the global. Again, rather than merely rewriting and revising themes and techniques of his African predecessors, as Ogede has earlier suggested (ix, x, xiii), Mabanckou references both African and non-African intertexts, thereby further highlighting the glocalised nature of his metafictional writing and history.

At work in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*, then, is what Hutcheon describes as postmodernist parody, which involves the "constant ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (124). By implication, parodic irony grants Mabanckou's novels an ambivalent position from which they not only assert similarity with and difference from their pretexts, but also simultaneously install and subvert the Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses which inform such pretexts. As Matei Calinescu argues, if parody repeats with irony, it paradoxically continues the past while distancing itself from it; it criticises while praising and emulating; and it conserves by the very act of relativising and revolutionising (245). This, of course, is what Allen calls the "destabilising function" of postmodernist intertextuality (*Intertextuality* 193), or what Ulrich Broich alternatively describes as the "deconstructive function" (253), which is critical and political in nature.

Exactly this subversive function of parodic irony is what the reader encounters when *Broken Glass* references the Bible through Mouyeké. As already noted, this character equates the Bible with a soap opera, thereby exposing its textuality and, in the process, its racial underpinnings

as a religious discourse which facilitated colonialism. He argues that, in the Bible, black people are often depicted in "satanic verses" as "devils, or very minor characters" and there are "no blacks among Jesus's disciples either" (76). The allusion to Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, is thematically telling in that this novel subversively parodies the Holy Koran from within its Islamic discourse. In a metaleptic short-circuiting of diegetic levels through *mise-en-abyme*, Mabanckou thus inscribes *The Satanic Verses* within both the Bible and *Broken Glass*. The inference here is that, in associating black people with the satanic verses in the Bible, Mabanckou adopts the subversive politics of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and interrogates the racialised assumptions of Christian discourse from within.

Indeed, as an African postmodernist writer who is critical of both Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses, Mabanckou also exposes the racialised justification of Mouyeké's accusation of the Bible. We read that Mouyeké wishes the Bible had "at least put one or two black angels there, just to butter up the negroes here on earth who refuse to alter their condition on the grounds that the Almighty got their skin colour wrong" (76). What is ironic, though, is that their resentment of their skin colour is an admission of the racial inferiority of the hypothetical 'negroes' to whom he refers. In other words, blacks demand fair representation in the Bible out of a sense of racial inferiority rather than as an assertion of racial equality, thereby reinforcing the skin colour difference they seek to undermine.

Likewise, *Black Bazaar* references the Bible with parodic irony, as is evident when the narrator reworks the creation story in Genesis. In the novel's prologue, we are told that, according to Congolese myth, the pygmies of Gabon possess "supernatural powers because they were the first people entrusted by God with the keys of the earth since the time of Genesis" (4). He further claims that God dedicated "the fifth day of creation" to them so that they should be "fruitful and

multiply and fill the earth" (4). While the myth reinstates the historical truth of the creation narrative, it subverts its accuracy by adding the pygmies of Gabon who are not in the original version, thereby undermining the omission of blacks in the Bible, which Mouyeké complains of in *Broken Glass*. However, in portraying the pygmies of Gabon as the ancestors of humanity, the myth installs the same racial tendencies it seeks to subvert.

Black Bazaar later references the Bible by rewriting the story of King Solomon and Noah's son, Ham. We read that, in refuting Roger's claim that Henriette's dark complexion is a symbol of racial inferiority, Paul from the big Congo (another Jip's regular) refers to the biblical Solomon who says that "a child is still a child, be he [or she] red, yellow or brown" (101). In the Bible, however, Solomon does not mention skin colour. It turns out that Paul ironically parodies Solomon in order to refute racism. By contrast, though, Mr Hippocratic makes a racial reference to "the curse of Ham" in justifying the evils of colonialism (229). According to this racialised logic, blacks, as descendants of the biblical Ham (who is condemned to eternal servitude for disrespecting his father), deserved colonial subjugation. Ironically, though, Mr Hippocratic is a former French colonial subject from Martinique. Whereas these biblical references suggest *Black Bazaar*'s mimetic impulse, they, in effect, subvert its objectivity, for the novel does not faithfully mirror biblical reality, but subversively parodies it from within.

In both *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*, the reader also finds references to *The Adventures of Tintin* and *Tarzan* comic strips, which simultaneously inscribe and subvert Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. So, for example, the narrator of *Broken Glass* informs us that he enjoys reading "the adventures of Tintin," and is especially partial to the "little dog, Snowy," who, unlike Trois-Cents dogs, possesses the human "power of reasoning" (138). While it is true that Tintin has a dog called Snowy in the comic strip, the fact that it has intelligence which African dogs lack

satirises the Eurocentric assumption that the white race is rational in contradistinction to African emotionality. In other words, this seemingly flippant juxtaposition of European and African dogs comments on the racialised assumption that anything white is superior and that anything black is inferior.

Likewise, *Black Bazaar* problematises racial prejudice when Roger comments on Tintin's adventures in the Congo. In confronting the narrator over the writing of the diary, he claims that Tintin came to "ghostly Africa" as part of the civilising mission and, for this reason, he does not "harbour a grudge against the settlers" (10). What is ironic about Roger's claim is that although the instalment of the comic strip in question is indeed set in Congo, it depicts Tintin as an explorer, not as a colonialist, while still drawing on racial stereotypes in its depiction of Congolese people, as becomes clear when the narrator argues that the portrayal of negroes as having "big fat pink lips" is a racial misrepresentation that is perpetuated by history books which advance the theory that Africans are still in "the evolutionary process of turning from monkeys into men" (48).

Such racial misrepresentation of Africans also unfolds in the reference to the *Tarzan* comic strip. In *Broken Glass*, as in *Black Bazaar*, the titular Tarzan is presented as a muscular hero and king of the jungle, who exists "in the company of wild animals" (138; 48). However, the narrator of *Black Bazaar* reveals that the "blonde version of Tarzan" which Original Colour has loved "since she was a little girl" is not the king of the African jungle (48). Implicit here is the fact that both Tarzan and Tintin are presented from a Eurocentric point of view in order to reinforce the colonial ideology that whites are superior to blacks. In installing and subverting this racial prejudice, *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* show that comic strips, despite their humorous content, are, in fact, socio-political commentaries of the cultural values they represent.

Mabanckou's two novels also foreground the connection of art to a politics of racial representation in their references to sculpture. In *Broken Glass*, for instance, we read that the Printer, during his mental breakdown after catching his estranged son with Céline in bed, describes God as "a black man the size of a sculpture" by the Senegalese artist, Ousmane Sow (51). Quite ironically, this description refutes the racialised image of God as white, but in doing so, the Printer replaces the white image with a black one, thereby conserving the discourse of race. In *Black Bazaar*, the immanence of racial discourse also emerges when the narrator vents his anger on the Hybrid by comparing his dark complexion to Sow's sculptures that "frightened some Parisians" (122). While in the Printer's case Sow's sculpture represents black superiority, in the case of the unnamed Congolese migrant writer it represents black inferiority. In both cases, Mabanckou ironically parodies the racial assumptions of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses from within.

Broken Glass and *Black Bazaar* achieve a similar parodic effect by referencing other literary texts, both African and non-African and, what is more, even Mabanckou's other novels. The two novels under discussion do so by staging a parodic conversation with their pretexts, especially in response to colonialism and its legacies. *Broken Glass*, for example, evokes Sembene Ousmane's novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, when the narrator informs the reader that the Stubborn Snail's competitors ridicule him as "one of God's bits of wood" (19). This description closely resembles the sexist image of Senegalese women in Ousmane's novel. As the title suggests, *God's Bits of Wood* tells the story of Senegalese women who, despite being subjected to patriarchal objectification and oppression, led the rebellion against the construction of a railway line by the French colonial administration in the 1940s. Importantly, in this regard, Ousmane's novel performs a critique of what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have described as double colonisation in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, that is, the notion that women were colonised

by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies (250). In alluding to *God's Bits of Wood*, then, Mabanckou does not only borrow the title of Ousmane's novel in order to depict the entrepreneurial image of the Stubborn Snail, but also opens up and comments on this text's anti-colonial politics.

A similar metafictional critique of colonialism is evident when *Broken Glass* later alludes to Camara Laye's *The Dark Child*, especially the narrator's depiction of himself as "the black child" in Guinea (138). Like Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, Laye's autobiographical novel concerns itself with the disruptive effects of French colonialism in West Africa. It details the protagonist's passage of rite from childhood to adulthood in colonial Guinea and, particularly, how French education destabilises the traditional obligation to replace his father as a family patriarch. According to Apollo Amoko, Laye's *The Dark Child* is one of the early African novels to document the crisis of colonialism in Africa and contribute to the struggle for independence (196). In comparing himself with the narrator of *The Dark Child*, Broken Glass transgresses the diegetic boundary between Laye's novel and his notebook and, in doing so, participates in exposing the disruptive effects of French colonialism in Guinea. *Broken Glass* thus inscribes and subverts the legacy of French colonialism, thereby highlighting the glocalised aspects of French colonialism and African decolonistion. Both political systems, in other words, participate in the transcultural exchange of local and global values.

This parodic interrogation of colonial history continues when *Broken Glass* references the first generation of African novels, which, as already noted, are nationalist in their realist form and content. When, for instance, we read that the Pampers guy "cough[s] up petals of blood" during his arrest for allegedly defiling his daughter, Amelie (32), the allusion is obviously to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. This novel is set in Kenya just after independence and traces the

experiences and memories of the Mau-Mau uprising against British colonial settlers, which, as the title indicates, was characterised by a lot of bloodshed. While Mabanckou references Ngugi's novel in order to thematise police brutality and domestic violence in Trois-Cents, he, in a metaleptic short-circuiting of diegetic levels, also comments on the bloody nature of the Mau-Mau rebellion. When we are also told that the Printer catches his son and Céline "tangled up in the poor Christ of Bomba position," that is, "one on top of the other" (49-50), the allusion is clearly to Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba*. Beti's novel satirises the missionary activities in Cameroon and, in using this pretext to develop the themes of incest and adultery, *Broken Glass* joins in the critique of French colonialism and Christianity.

In *Black Bazaar*, this metafictional critique of enforced modernity emerges when the novel parodically inscribes and subverts Mr Hippocratic's racial justification for colonialism. He references Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* in his argument that Africans "were accessories to" colonialism and that, thanks to it, "the Cameroonian Ferdinand Oyono wrote *The Old Man and the Medal* and *Houseboy*," and Beti "wrote *Cruel Town* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba*," while René Maran wrote *Batouala* and became the first black man to win "the Prix Goncourt which [wa]s meant to be the reserve of Whites" (225-26). While Mr Hippocratic ascribes these literary productions to the influence of Western education that this first generation of African writers received, he forgets that not all such novels justify colonialism, as becomes clear in his confession that Maran "criticised us in his book even though he was working in our colonial administration" (226). Moreover, although Mr Hippocratic considers himself to be a French citizen, he is a former colonial subject from Martinique, who is subjected to racial discrimination like other black migrants. In destabilising the racial assumptions of such colonial discourses, *Black*

Bazaar once again suggests that Western imperialism and African decolonisation are caught up in the cultural entanglement of localising the global.

Furthermore, both *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* simultaneously inscribe and undermine the grand narrative of colonialism as the civilising mission by parodically referencing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. As Stephen Slemon maintains, the imposition of such canonical texts in colonial education was one of the strategies of Western imperialism:

> one of colonialism's most salient technologies for social containment and control is the circulation within colonial cultures of the canonical European literary text. Mediated through the colonialist educational apparatus, the European literary text becomes a powerful machinery for forging what Gramsci called domination by consent; and in recognizing this, post-colonial critical discourse seeks to position the oppositional and reiterative textual responses of post-colonial cultures in dialectical relation to their colonialist precursors [and in] a 'parodic' repetition of imperial 'textuality' sets itself specifically in opposition to the interpellative power of colonialism. (4)

The point of Slemon's argument is that postcolonial discourse is fundamentally oppositional to colonial discourse, and it achieves this by parodic mimicry. However, without irony, parody simply replaces what it mocks. By implication, then, postcolonial discourse runs the risk of reinstating the racial assumptions that characterise Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. As glocalised texts, however, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* simultaneously inscribe and subvert the racial assumptions of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses through parodic irony.

For instance, as in *Heart of Darkness*, Céline's parents in *Broken Glass* describe Africa as a "mysterious bush" with "wild animals skipping about in the wide open spaces" (42), while Original Colour in *Black Bazaar* calls it the "heart of darkness," full of magic and cannibalism

(48). According to Achebe, although *Heart of Darkness* ridicules Europe's civilising mission in Africa, the novel evinces racial prejudices that were normative in 19th century Europe (8). Similarly, Mabanckou explains to Wainaina that novels like *Heart of Darkness* project an enduring racialised image of Africa and that is why it is important for the continent's writers to give their characters a subversive voice against such prejudice (35). What is ironic, though, is that Mabanckou presents characters that display racial prejudice, as is the case of the narrator in *Black Bazaar*, who, as already noted, describes Original Colour's dark complexion in racialised terms. Nevertheless, Mabanckou suggests that racism should not be condemned in binarist terms because doing so implicates both blacks and whites in its enforcement and related violence against humanity.

Not surprisingly, Mabanckou has his narrator engage in a critique of the Spanish colonisation of Latin America. When Broken Glass claims that his reading has made him "live one hundred years of solitude" with "a character called Melquiades" in a "village called Macondo" (138), the allusion is evidently to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Although he appears to merely identify with Melquiades, Broken Glass, in a metaleptic transgression of diegetic levels, enters a political metadiegetic level within Marquez's novel, namely the cultural conflict between the West and Latin America. As Kumkum Sangari argues, Spain determined and shaped the cultural heterogeneity of Latin America by erasing its indigenous history and that *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, through its non-mimetic narrative mode, answers the need for renewed self-description by refuting the Eurocentric images of the native in the name of modernity (158, 162). As glocalised texts, then, both *Broken Glass* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* show that colonial and native history are implicated in, and thus shaped by, each other in ways that undermine the essentialist representation of cultural values and identities.

Broken Glass and *Black Bazaar* also ironically parody colonialism by reworking Mabanckou's other novels through the metafictional device of *retour de personnages* or transworld identity, which, according to McHale, occurs when "identical characters recur in different texts by the same author" (57; emphasis in original). *Broken Glass*, for instance, borrows "Angoualima, the twelve-fingered assassin" from Mabanckou's previous novel, *African Psycho* (19). In the novel, other bar owners in Trois-Cents compare the Stubborn Snail to Angoualima and the Pampers guy claims that he is more dangerous than the "well-known serial killer" (19, 31). While the two novels underscore the fact that they have similar characters, they also gesture towards a political critique of the dehumanisation Angoualima suffers in the Congolese foster care system, which, as I argue in the second and fourth chapters of this thesis, is one of the vestiges of French colonialism. My point is that if Western postmodernism is a critique of modernity from within, African postmodernism must also be a critique of French colonial institutions and policies in the Congolese context.

In *Black Bazaar*, transworld identity unfolds when the novel transports its characters to *Black Moses*, especially those involved in the story about a president from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo who poisons Moleki Nzela, his political rival. What changes in *Black Moses*, however, is that the struggle between the two characters is set in Pointe-Noire, rather than in neighbouring Congo, and that the name of the rival is Wabongo-Wabongo III. Nevertheless, transworld identity enables Mabanckou to critique dictatorship and corruption as disruptive effects of colonialism. In both *Black Bazaar* and *Black Moses*, the two political rivals blatantly abuse power and state funds for their personal benefit. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, African postcolonial leaders took over the role of former colonial bourgeoisie after

gaining independence from the 1950s and, since then, act as intermediaries between national resources and global capitalism with impunity (149, 152).

Mabanckou's critique of the destabilising effects of colonialism also emerges when *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* parodically allude to postcolonial theoretical intertexts. So, for instance, when the Printer boasts that he mixed whites "with the other wretched of the earth" in his printing company (39), the allusion is to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Ironically, by describing other races as the wretched of the earth, the Printer installs Fanon's critique of colonial racism, but, at the same time, subverts the idea that blacks are the only wretched of the earth, for, as previously noted, even some whites are poor too. Mabanckou's novel then alludes to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* when the Printer, in disputing the view that marriages between whites and blacks last long if the black man "keeps his black skin but wears a white mask," ends up ironically parodying his own racial prejudice (44). Although he denies being a racist, the fact that he derives a sense of superiority from marrying Céline proves that he indeed keeps his black skin but wears a white mask. Similarly, *Black Bazaar* alludes to *Black Skin, White Masks* when Mr Hippocratic claims that, during colonialism, Africans had to choose "a black skin or a white mask" (229), and yet he both keeps his black skin and wears a white mask as a former French colonial subject.

As *Black Bazaar* progresses, Mabanckou interrogates the anti-colonial ideology by exposing its underpinnings in racial discourses and their contradictions. We read that Djamal refutes the racialised narrative that, before colonialism, Africa was uncivilised, and he does so by alluding to Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization*, which, in his opinion, proves that "Blacks in ancient Egypt" created the first human civilisation (109). However, when Djamal subsequently claims that blacks are more intelligent than whites, he reverses the racism he seeks to refute (110). Similarly, Mr Hippocratic references Diop's other book entitled *Civilisation or*

Barbarism to support his racial claim that Africans had to choose "civilisation or barbarism" during colonialism (228), and yet, in this book, Diop suggests that Western civilisation is a form of barbarism. What is even more ironic is the fact that, in citing Diop's book, Mr Hippocratic undermines the binary hierarchy of its title by affirming that colonialism is both civilising and barbaric. In simultaneously locating itself within these racialised narratives and ironically subverting them, *Black Bazaar* illustrates the cultural entanglement that characterises the aesthetic practice of localising the global in the African postcolonial context.

This ironic parody of colonialism and its disruptive effects also becomes evident when *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* reference philosophical intertexts. When a Congolese dictator, Mingi, declares that "Religion is the opium of the people" (12), *Broken Glass* alludes to Karl Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. While Mingi's declaration is an implied critique of religion's role in Western imperialism, his own leadership promotes the cooperation of church and state. Similarly, *Black Bazaar* alludes to Friedrich Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* and Marx's *Capital* when another Congolese dictator quotes long passages from the two texts in his fight against Western imperialism, and yet enriches himself and the ruling elite at the expense of the masses (237). What is ironic here is that Mabanckou simultaneously asserts and undermines the ideological importance of Marxism in African history and politics. He shows that Marxism was transculturated into social realism by the first generation of African leaders and writers for nationalist and decolonisation purposes. At the same time, though, Mabanckou exposes the tendency of African leaders to use Marxist slogans as convenient cover-ups for dictatorship and corruption, thereby reinforcing Western imperialism in its current phase of neo-colonialism and global capitalism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* employ the self-reflexive techniques of metalepsis and intertextuality as a postmodernist critique of the representational claims of colonialism. In my close reading of the two novels, I have demonstrated that these metafictional strategies accord Mabanckou an ambivalent position from which he simultaneously inscribes and subverts the racial assumptions of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses. As a postcolonial writer whose Afrodiasporic identity places him in the cultural entanglement between the local and the global, Mabanckou invests his surrogate authors with a political ambivalence towards both Western and African modernity. That is, as they draw attention to the metaleptic and intertextual dimensions of the two novels, the narrators also engage in political commentary which problematises the socio-political effects of Western modernity in its colonial form. It is in this regard that Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* may be read as indicating that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, it must also be a response to enforced modernity and its disruptive effects in the African postcolonial context.

Another contention in this chapter has been that Mabanckou's self-reflexive writing gestures towards multicultural tolerance in order to achieve coexistence beyond the violence of racism. As I have amply shown, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar*, owing to their self-reflexive awareness, and thus interrogation, of the representational illusions and contradictions of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses, invite the West and Africa to undertake a self-critique of their socio-political assumptions and conventions. Indeed, if read in this self-reflexive context, the two novels increasingly come to resemble what Olaniyan describes as a critical postmodernist writing, which is historically informed and socially conscious in ways that

facilitate the engagement with African socio-political realities in the current era of neo-colonialism and global capitalism (*Postmodernism, Postcoloniality, and African Studies* 52).

Chapter Two: Beyond Self-Recognition: Fragmented Subjectivity in *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*

Massala-Massala and Grégoire Nabomakoyo, the protagonists and narrators of Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho* respectively, draw the reader's attention towards their ontological status as fragmented subjects. *Blue White Red*, whose title literally represents colours of the French flag, details the experiences of Massala-Massala, a high school dropout who migrates to Paris from the Congolese city of Pointe-Noire in order to liberate his family from poverty under the tutelage of his compatriot and former schoolmate, Charles Moki. On the other hand, *African Psycho*, as the title indicates, traces Grégoire's psychopathic life from his orphaned childhood to early adulthood as a car mechanic in the fictitious Congolese city of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot. Both novels deal with how modern urban conditions in the French metropolis and postcolonial Congo fragment the subjectivities of Massala-Massala and Grégoire beyond their own self-recognition.

Albert J. Paolini, in his work entitled *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*, ascribes precisely this form of psychological fragmentation to the disorienting influence of Western modernity, which subjects Africans to social, political, and economic pressure, especially in its current global capitalist phase (19-20). The following chapter takes Paolini's cue by attributing the fragmentation of Massala-Massala's subjectivity to the social, political, and economic upheavals emanating from a stringent French immigration legislation. Not surprisingly, Wandia Njoya, in her discussion of the cultural intersection of transnationalism and masculinity, describes *Blue White Red* as a vivid revelation of the "damaging historical, psychological, and social dynamics of African migration" (355). By comparison, the fragmentation of Grégoire's subjectivity arises not only from his abandonment as an unwanted baby by his biological mother, but also from the human rights abuses that he suffers in the

Congolese foster care system, a state program that enforces the adoption of orphans. *African Psycho*, as John Walsh notes, places the reader into Grégoire's disturbed mind and arrested development (154).

In his presentation of the psychological fragmentation of his protagonists, Mabanckou provides a postmodernist critique of Western modernity in an African postcolonial context, which I will elaborate on in this chapter of my thesis. *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho* are indeed informed by the postmodernist understanding of the relationship between the human subject and its environment. As I shall demonstrate, postmodernism problematises liberal humanist notions of subjectivity and agency, which proceed from the Enlightenment tradition and, specifically, from its underlying ideology of instrumental rationality, whose central assumption is that human beings have the capacity to profitably master and exploit nature. This conception of the human subject and agency, as Stuart Sim points out, characterises the mercantile impulse of Western modernity in all its liberal humanist and global capitalist forms (336).

As noted previously, the colonial encounter between Africa and the West initiated the process of glocalisation, in which the transcultural entanglement between the local and the global negates the binarist construction of values and identities. It is precisely in this glocalisation context that Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his critique of the notion of identity, draws on Chinua Achebe's conceptualisation of African identity as a process in the making, rather than a stable entity (173). Extending Achebe's assertion, Appiah maintains that:

> Every human identity is constructed, historical; every one has its share of false presuppositions, of the errors and inaccuracies that courtesy calls "myth," religion "heresy," and science "magic." Invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural

> affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite manages to conform. (174)

Implicit in Appiah's argument is the constructed nature of any human identity and, more importantly, the African one whose ontogenesis he ascribes to "differences in colonial experience" since the late 1800s (174). In other words, African identity is a product of, and therefore perpetually contingent on, the transcultural exchange of values that occurs in the in liminal space between the local and the global. Consequently, as Appiah further contends, African identities "are complex and multiple," for they "grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities" (178). The implication of this identity entanglement is that, in responding and adapting to different local and global value systems, African postcolonial subjects become caught up in a flux of ontological fragmentation, which ultimately generates a plurality of modes of being.

The complexity and multiplicity of African postcolonial identities that Appiah speaks of strikingly accords with Achille Mbembe's critique of the binarist conception of identity in *On the Postcolony*:

> [A]s a result of the tension inherent in the project of emancipation and assimilation discussion of the possibility of an African modernity was reduced to an endless interrogation of the possibility, for the African subject, of achieving a balance between his/her total identification with "traditional" (in philosophies of authenticity) African life, and his/her merging with, and subsequent loss in, modernity (in the discourse of alienation). For many, it has ended, *either* in acceptance of a tragic duality and an inner twoness, or – as a result of repeated stress on the absoluteness of the African self (in the terms of Afrocentric theses) – in an extraordinary sensitivity about identity. […] However,

> both the asserted denial and the *reaffirmation* of that humanity now look like the two sterile sides of the same coin. (12; emphasis in original)

Mbembe's point in this passage is that, while it is convenient to attach one's sense of self to either Afrocentric or Eurocentric values, African postcolonial identities transcend rather than affirm the polarity between, even the simple combination of, the local and the global. In making this point, Mbembe draws attention to how the cultural entanglement in the Third Space (to borrow Bhabha's term) undermines the concept of hybridity as merely a stable fusion of two different identities, but rather a contested navigation of these different modes of existence. This is the conceptual shift of African modernity that Mbembe advances by suggesting that identity is always a negotiated affair and that, for this reason, it is inherently glocalised.

Importantly, in this regard, the constructed nature of African postcolonial identities evinces a strong ideological affinity with postmodernism's critique of the humanist conception of identity. Indeed, Sim argues that postmodernism interrogates the model of the subject as a rational, unified, powerful, and controlling agency with a central core of identity (366). Similarly, Simon Malpas, in his study entitled *The Postmodern*, argues that postmodernism calls into question the idea of the human subject as a synthesising agency which projects an illusion of the subject's power to determine its own conditions of existence, when, in fact, the subject is constructed by the conditions of its existence produced within a specific cultural context (65). Malpas further argues that such a radical critique of the self-conscious and self-sufficient subject implies that identity is the product of the social, cultural, and technological context from which it emerges (79), just as this chapter aims to demonstrate in the case of Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*.

The glocalised nature of African postcolonial identities exerts a critical bearing on the decolonisation project, especially the widespread argument that Europe underdeveloped Africa.

What such a binarist perspective overlooks, though, is the complicity of African post-independence leaders in the global capitalist impoverishment and plunder of the continent's natural resources and revenue. Tellingly, in this connection, Frantz Fanon, in his seminal chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth* entitled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," maintains that the African ruling elite after independence has hitherto assumed the role of "the intermediary," that is, "the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism" (152). Quite paradoxically, African regimes reinforce the neo-colonialism they seek to expose and dismantle in the first place.

Indeed, Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of enforced modernity in *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho* attends to the contradictions of the decolonisation movement in terms of how French and Congolese social, economic, and political policies affect the identity formation of postcolonial subjects. I will therefore demonstrate at some length that the existential awareness of Massala-Massala and Grégoire is shaped by specific social, political, and economic conditions within the French and Congolese cultures, which, being in a continuous state of flux, leave their sense of identity equally unstable. In depicting Massala-Massala and Grégoire as products of the disorienting city conditions in Paris and He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot, Mabanckou invests *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho* with a postmodernist dimension, which, nevertheless, has an African provenance. The implication, of course, is that the two novels are examples of African postmodernist writing, and, in the present chapter, I intend to examine how and why they fit this glocalised status.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore the socio-political relevance and implications of employing a postmodernist aesthetic in Mabanckou's presentation of fragmented subjectivity in *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*. My argument is that, in the two novels,

Mabanckou enacts a postmodernist critique of the psychological effects of both the French immigration legislation and the Congolese foster care system. In this regard, I will show that Massala-Massala's migrant experiences in Paris and Grégoire's traumatic childhood in the Congolese city of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot reduce their respective selves to a flux of personalities. In other words, the two protagonists display conflicting personalities, and so their selfhood and, indeed, their self-perception is always in a process of perpetual deferment, uncertainty, instability, and indeterminacy.

I shall further contend that Mabanckou's postmodernist presentation of subjectivity as a recurring process of fragmentation problematises Massala-Massala's and Grégoire's agency, since they perpetually fail to act against the very modern city conditions that constitute their existence. This paradox of seeking to undermine the existential forces within which one's selfhood is rooted strikingly resembles the classical myth of Sisyphus, in which the putative Greek hero is condemned to the absurd task of constantly pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. Likewise, in *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*, the socio-economic conditions in France and the Republic of Congo force the two protagonists to commit crime in order to gain a coherent sense of self, and yet, in the process, they end up fragmenting themselves beyond even their own self-recognition. As I proceed, it will become clear that fragments of Massala-Massala's and Grégoire's selfhood manifest themselves in their self-contradictions and ambivalent performance of other characters' identities.

A Web of Contradictions

In both *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*, Mabanckou employs extended monologues and flashbacks. Massala-Massala recounts his experiences before and after his fortune-seeking migration to France, whereas Grégoire relates his abortive plan to kill Germaine, his lover and

prostitute from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, in a bid to rid He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot of moral decadence and to emulate the criminal legacy of his deceased idol, Angoualima, the serial killer. However, these monologues and flashbacks simultaneously reveal the innermost desires of Massala-Massala and Grégoire and an irreconcilable conflict between these desires and their fulfilment in that the more the two protagonists assert a certain personality the more they contradict themselves.

Importantly, these self-contradictions foreground Mabanckou's use of a postmodernist aesthetic in his African postcolonial novels. He localises the postmodernist interrogation of subjectivity by suggesting that the ontological instability of the two narrators derives from the contradictory nature of French immigration policies and the Congolese foster care system, both of which exert a disorienting influence on migrants and orphans respectively, instead of upholding their intended humanitarian *telos*. In other words, Mabanckou's treatment of subjectivity is premised on the paradox of undermining a culture one inhabits from within, which, as I maintain throughout this thesis, is closely related to the aesthetic practice of localising the global.

What this paradox implies is that, as a postcolonial-postmodernist writer, Mabanckou's Afrodiasporic identity necessitates his simultaneous association with and critique of both Congolese and French cultures. Having indeed grown up in Pointe-Noire and stayed in Paris for a long time, Mabanckou does not only identify with Congolese and French cultures, but also interrogates their socio-political assumptions and conventions from within. Differently put, his relationship with the Republic of Congo and France is inevitably and perpetually one of familiarity and criticism.

Blue White Red evinces Mabanckou's political ambivalence towards the draconian French immigration policies and the economic mismanagement of African governments. Crucially, in this

regard, Revathi Krishnaswamy traces the migration of postcolonial subjects to Western countries as follows:

> The rhetoric of migrancy, exile, and diaspora in contemporary postcolonial discourse owes much of its credibility to the massive and uneven uprooting of 'Third World' peoples in recent decades, particularly after large-scale decolonization in the 1960s. As the euphoria of independence and the great expectations of nationalism gave way to disillusionment and oppression, emigration increasingly became the supreme reward for citizens of impoverished or repressive ex-colonies. (131)

It is in this context of disillusionment and poverty that Congolese migration to France should be placed and understood. According to Dominic Thomas, the lack of local socio-economic opportunities forces sub-Saharan African youths to migrate to Europe, where, being unqualified for formal employment, they resort to crime in order to survive (*Black France* 189). At the beginning of Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*, in this regard, we meet Massala-Massala in a French prison called Seine-Saint-Denis, incarcerated for his involvement in stealing check books, using them to buy transit passes, and reselling them for a profit on the black market of Château-Rouge. This migrant venture, while obviously illegal, is encouraged by the French policy of assimilation, which purportedly grants citizenship rights to the country's former colonial subjects, only to treat them as illegal immigrants when they arrive there.

Njoya criticises such diplomatic double-dealing when she argues that African migration to France is a demeaning undertaking because the country offers access to its consumer culture and yet reinforces punitive immigration laws that criminalise African migrants (346). For Mireille Rosello, the implementation in 1993 of these so-called Pasqua laws (named after Charles Pasqua, a two-time interior minister of post-war France) was "the most obvious manifestation of the French

government's anti-immigration attitude" (1). Since then, as Thomas points out, African migration to France has been characterised by encumbrances such as stiff border control, travel and residency documentation, refugee status, and the risks of clandestine existence (*Black France* 187).

Although Mabanckou clearly problematises the oppressive nature of the French immigration legislation, he also holds African migrants responsible for their criminal activities. He suggests that, just as France must practise immigration hospitality in the spirit of glocalisation (which presupposes the transnational citizenship of every individual), African migrants must also abide by the country's residency rules. By exposing the failure of both France and African migrants to perform these ethical obligations, Mabanckou once again shows that African postmodernism installs and subverts the conventions and assumptions of both the local and the global. Exactly this postmodernist ambivalence is what we witness in Mabanckou's portrayal of the French immigration legislation and the Congolese criminal network as systems that reinforce and undermine each other in a way reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic, that is, alternately acting as thesis and anti-thesis, whose synthesis is common injustice.

In Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*, this paradox is particularly evident in the French immigration legislation itself and its after-effects of corruption and racism. Part two of the novel entitled "Paris," which focuses on Massala-Massala's first impressions of the city, reveals that immigration laws change "from one government to the next" (106). These laws, we are told, are used "as a political football to win a vote or two from the intolerant French people" and, since they vary from context to context, the police do not know which "procedure to follow" (107). Such constitutional discrepancies, to borrow Thomas's words in his preface to the novel, lead to racial profiling, arbitrary police roundups, detention, and deportation ("African Migration" xiii). Likewise, the intolerance of the French citizens is rooted in the state's racialised ideology that

conceives of African migrants as unnecessary "pressure on French society" (107). Fundamentally, then, the French immigration legislation, regardless of its ideological modalities, is premised on a strictly nationalistic, and therefore xenophobic, framework, which undermines its glocalisation rhetoric.

However, Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* demonstrates that the adherence to this anti-migrant template is fraught with recurring contradictions. In the novel, the first such contradiction, namely the corruption of the French police, becomes blatantly clear in Château-Rouge, the mercantile hub populated by "primarily foreigners" (93). Although the French police force conducts premeditated patrols to catch people without residency papers in this migrant space, the law enforcers themselves aid some illegal migrants to escape the surveillance machinery (95). This incriminating irony unfolds when Massala-Massala discloses that Préfet – the first Congolese in the novel to come to Paris and who later initiates the former into the migrant underworld on Moki's recommendation – publicly boasts that he will "never go to prison again," because he knows "some policemen" and has "influence" (104). Massala-Massala further observes that the French police are "not very satisfied with bribes" and even betray their trusted accomplices like Préfet whenever it is convenient to do so (107).

The novel also exposes the corrupt tendencies of ordinary French citizens, who, despite their visceral xenophobic attitude, collude with African migrants in various illegal activities. We read that French nationals "interested in easy money" without paying taxes sell Préfet "their identity cards," which he then turns into counterfeit residency papers and sells to new African migrant arrivals, especially of Congolese extraction (107). Our awareness of the French public's complicity in Préfet's racketeering increases when we learn that he always has ready cooperation from "*the white pipeline*" that provides him with "blank documents" (104; emphasis in original).

A telling irony here is that the French immigration system generates national ambivalence towards African migrants, rather than outright hostility. As I demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, the relationship between French natives and Congolese migrants is marked by this mutual ambivalence, as is the case with the printer in *Broken Glass* and the narrator in *Black Bazaar*, who are both victims and perpetrators of racial prejudice.

African Psycho similarly highlights Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of the Congolese foster care system and adoptive families. While he acknowledges the humanitarian impulse of these institutions, he reveals their hypocrisy and irresponsibility. Instead of rescuing orphans from deprivation and depravity, both systems drive them into vagrancy and crime. What is at work in Mabanckou's novel, then, is the simultaneous installation and subversion of Congolese modernity. Indeed, Walsh has pointed out that *African Psycho* offers a critique of the government's social negligence (155). In the fourth chapter of this study, I show how Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* also expose the disorienting effects of the punitive education policies on the socialisation of pupils and, more tellingly, why orphanages turn into breeding grounds for young criminals.

In *African Psycho* itself, Grégoire accuses the state of forcefully placing him in foster families, which indicates that the "rigorous selection process" of orphans – or "picked-up children" as residents of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot sometimes contemptuously call them – is merely a socio-economic expedient, for, in coercing them into foster families, the government abdicates its responsibility to the public (8-9). Quite evidently, the state neither cares to monitor the welfare of the orphans in their foster homes nor the responsibility of the adoptive parents.

This negligence ultimately puts orphans at the risk of human rights abuses in their foster families. In Mabanckou's novel, Grégoire confesses that he hates even the very "thought of living

with these host families" because, despite their humanitarian intentions, they treat an orphan like "an animal found on the street" (8). Significantly, he experiences this dehumanisation in a family of "very cultivated civil servants," who live in the centre of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot (9). During his one-year stay with this family, his foster parents subject him to intelligence tests as if he is an experimental specimen in a laboratory (9). In addition, they force him to "wear cumbersome clothes" even in extremely hot temperatures, making him suffocate and sweat profusely (9).

Grégoire also suffers discrimination and physical violence in this family. Although he is "lucky to get an education" unlike other adopted orphans, he is sent to the "People's School," a public establishment for the poor, which is located near his foster home (9-10). In stark contrast, his adoptive brother attends "a private school where the children of European aid cadres" go (11). Worse still, at the People's School, a cruel female teacher in catechism classes beats Grégoire and his classmates repeatedly for any failure to remember concepts (10). Likewise, his adoptive brother, acting on an insensitive disclosure from his parents that he is an orphan, whips him for personal amusement whenever they are alone (13). He eventually runs away from this family after gouging out his adoptive brother's eye in defending himself against the threat of sodomy. Having gone through these psychological and corporal abuses, Grégoire vows to become a menace to He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot (13).

What the contradictions of the French immigration legislation and the Congolese foster care system have in common is their destabilising effect on the selfhood and subjectivity of Massala-Massala and Grégoire in the sense that they force the two protagonists to adopt conflicting personalities in order to survive and to navigate existential bearings in the brutalising conditions of their respective milieus. In a related context, Mbembe maintains that African postcolonial

subjects, whether in private or public domains, exercise the ability to manage multiple identities, which are in a continuous state of mitosis (104). Indeed, from a postmodernist standpoint, Thomas Docherty reminds us that, in this process of mitosis, a human subject turns into a series of personalities that do not represent any coherent selfhood, for it is this very notion of coherence that postmodernism challenges (185). Accordingly, Massala-Massala and Grégoire bear the marks of postmodernist subjectivity because their social and political contexts destabilise and defer a concrete sense of self.

In *Blue White Red*, this personality deferment appears in Massala-Massala's contemplation of events leading up to his imprisonment. In fact, the novel opens with his optimism and self-determination to escape from Seine-Saint-Denis prison and go back to his life of crime. However, he immediately contradicts himself by confessing his "split between a pressing anxiety" and a "false serenity" (3). We notice a related split in his claim that he is not fatalistic because he always overcomes insurmountable obstacles, and yet he later admits that sometimes "strength abandons us to our fate" (4). It turns out that he is torn between hope and despair, between fatalism and self-determination, and these fluctuations accord with Sim's description of a postmodernist subject as "a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity" (367). Massala-Massala, by inference, cannot identify himself as either an optimist, or a pessimist, since his sense of self is fragmented.

While Mabanckou problematises the disorienting effects of solitary confinement, he suggests that Massala-Massala's desire to escape compounds his fragmentation. The more he feels like escaping back to the criminal world the more he feels bound to his prison cell. So, for example, he asserts that, since his arrest, he has never thought of escaping because he does not see himself as a prisoner, arguing that it is the prison authorities who are concerned about preventing his escape (12). Consequently, in hatching his escape plan, self-hatred and self-exoneration overwhelm him

(137). The perpetual vacillation of Massala-Massala's identity draws an instructive comparison with Mike Marais' description of Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and, in particular, his assertion that their "self-mastery is never final, but rather always tenuous, because the self, in its incompletion, is constantly becoming otherwise than it is and was" (245). As earlier argued, such lack of self-mastery in Mabanckou's novel demonstrates its postmodernist critique of the humanist conception of subjectivity and agency because Massala-Massala is caught up in the criminal life that simultaneously installs and erodes his sense of identity.

Blue White Red extends this postmodernist interrogation of humanist subjectivity and agency to Massala-Massala's deportation after serving his eighteen-month jail sentence. On the one hand, the novel suggests that, although the deportation of Massala-Massala underscores the strictness of the French immigration legislation, the certainty of his return unveils corrupt loopholes in the system. On the other hand, Mabanckou shows that Massala-Massala's desire to return to Paris aggravates his lack of self-mastery because he is bound to resume illegal residency and activities that will surely lead to perpetual imprisonment and deportation. Such lack of self-mastery is apparent in his deportation flight to Congo. Having failed to achieve his "blue-white-red dream," he dreads going back home empty-handed for he knows he will be "the laughingstock" of Pointe-Noire (112, 141-42).

However, when he considers the "possibility of returning to France," Massala-Massala concedes he is "undecided on the subject," yet still says he has mentally prepared himself to go back (147). He amplifies this self-contradiction when he asks himself "Did I say go back?" (147). His rhetorical question effectively suggests both the decision and the indecision to return to Paris. In pondering these conflicting options, he is not even sure whether he is "asleep or awake" and,

what is more, he insists "there is no border between dreams and reality" (147), which is to say that to go back or not go back to Paris entails both fantasy and reality. At work here, of course, is the interminable disintegration of Massala-Massala's selfhood to the extent that he can barely comprehend his own thought process, let alone his real desire.

On the other hand, *African Psycho* presents the postmodernist critique of the Congolese foster care system and Grégoire's criminal tendencies. The novel traces his lack of self-mastery to not only his traumatic childhood, but also his contradictory animosity against He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot and prostitutes in general. The resulting self-contradictions and the accompanying absence of his self-mastery appear as early as the opening page. Mark Libin rightly observes that, from the beginning of the novel, Grégoire frames his narrative as an exercise in contradictions and ambiguities (49). He first contradicts himself when he announces his decision "to kill Germaine on December 29," claiming that he has "now reached the necessary state of mind" in his preparations, but exposes his unpreparedness in a nervous breakdown he suffers while choosing a weapon with which to commit the murder (1-2). What is ontologically at stake here is a form of cognitive dissonance, which induces shifting personalities between preparedness and unpreparedness, between courage and cowardice. As such, Grégoire comes increasingly to resemble a postmodernist character who, Docherty argues, "never *is*, but is always *about-to-be*, endlessly deferred" (169; emphasis in original).

From the African postmodernist perspective, however, Mabanckou shows that the endless deferment of Grégoire's selfhood proceeds from both his brutalising experiences in He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot and his own misplaced hatred of prostitutes. The reason that he gives for his deep-seated desire to kill Germaine and other prostitutes, especially from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, is to restore the "honor" and the "image" of He-Who-Drinks-

Water-Is-An-Idiot (18). He particularly dislikes these migrant prostitutes for competing with local ones by unfairly lowering their prices, for taking advantage of poor clients, and for tarnishing the reputation of the city altogether (78, 80). In that Grégoire is determined to recuperate the lost dignity of his city, he passes for a dutiful crusader against crime and moral decadence. He shocks the reader, however, by stating that he naturally hates He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot like Angoualima, and that he will continue unleashing criminal terror on it, probably for subjecting him and his idol to childhood trauma (32, 127). Grégoire is therefore both a guardian and a menace to his own city, for he safeguards and attacks it at the same time. The resulting paradox leads us to conclude that his "project of cleaning up" He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot is a pretext for his hidden desire to kill his mother, whom he suspects of having been a whore (64, 89, 95). Due to these opposing desires, Grégoire's selfhood fluctuates between benevolence and malevolence. Mabanckou thus criticises both the city's dehumanising conditions and Grégoire's hypocrisy for causing the fluctuation of his subjectivity.

This constant fluctuation of subjectivity is also evident in Grégoire's desire to beat Angoualima's criminal record and in his ambivalent attitude towards foster families. Although Grégoire declares his loyalty as Angoualima's disciple, his wish to surpass all the crimes of his idol through Germaine's murder renders him an opponent (4, 37). Grégoire, it follows, is Angoualima's disciple and rival at the same time. Grégoire then expresses conflicting sentiments about his previous foster families when he starts living alone on the outskirts of He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot in a shoddy house built with his own savings. He argues that, despite resenting adoptive families, he is grateful to them for educating him (14). What is contradictory in his logic is that he still harbours both resentment and affection towards these foster families. In African postmodernist terms, Mabanckou concurrently acknowledges and undermines the impact of the

Congolese foster care system on Grégoire's psychological development. Similarly, Mabanckou depicts Grégoire as a victim of both childhood trauma and his own criminal inclinations.

The Ambivalent Appropriation of Identities

In *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Mark Currie argues that identity is relational, by which he means that it is not inside an individual, but in his or her relations with other individuals (17). This conception of identity is implicit in Mabanckou's presentation of Massala-Massala's and Grégoire's fragmented subjectivities, and especially in their ambivalent appropriation of other characters' identities. In both *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*, these characters resemble the personality and experiences of the narrator, including his very own alter ego in the form of mirror images and shadows. However, Mabanckou's glocalised writing deploys this postmodernist conception of identity differently. Rather than simply indicating that the identities of Massala-Massala and Grégoire derive from their ambivalent relations with other characters, Mabanckou suggests that such associations ultimately cause an existential crisis. The two protagonists constantly associate with and dissociate themselves from fellow victims of the French immigration legislation and the Congolese foster care system, who turn out to be their criminal role models.

These ambivalent relationships offer an extension of Currie's argument, namely if identity is relational, then it must be performative. In other words, to identify with an individual is to perform his or her identity, whether consciously or not. However, the fact that we must identify with different individuals implies that our own identities and the identification process itself are always in a state of flux. It is this ontological flux that makes Massala-Massala and Grégoire become what Sim calls "a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time" (367). As Tim Woods similarly maintains, postmodernism views human identity as deferred and fragmented, rather than as undivided and coherent (5, 10).

Not surprisingly, then, Mabanckou demonstrates that the fragmentation of Massala-Massala's and Grégoire's subjectivities is further aggravated by their choice of criminal role models which, by implication, forces the two protagonists to perform criminal identities as well. As previously noted, however, postmodernism interrogates the humanist concepts of subjectivity and agency by showing that an individual's sense of self is implicated in the very existential forces he or she seeks to act against. The inference here is that while the performance of criminal identities provides Massala-Massala and Grégoire with a sense of existential solidarity, it perpetually reinforces the disorienting socio-economic conditions of Paris and He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot, from within which their sense of self emerges even more fragmented.

In *Blue White Red*, Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of Massala-Massala's conditions of existence and his failure to exercise moral agency becomes apparent when this character is about to commit his first crime. For him to survive as an illegal immigrant, he consorts with criminals like Moki and Préfet, and yet, in doing so, feels alienated from his criminal identity, as becomes clear when he looks at himself in their apartment's broken mirror. We read that Massala-Massala cannot recognise a "dismembered and fragmented image" of himself with one big eye, two mouths, overlapping teeth, four arched eyebrows, and three nostrils, and admits not knowing himself anymore (113). While these physical distortions are undoubtedly a consequence of the mirror's broken state, they nonetheless symbolise his inner fragmentation. At this juncture, the novel evinces Mabanckou's political ambivalence towards socio-economic opportunities in Paris and the criminal life of African migrants. The point is that, while these two aspects of Congolese migration are necessary for Massala-Massala's survival, they combine to fragment his sense of self.

The harsh conditions of Seine-Saint-Denis prison exert a similar disruptive influence on his identity. In the early weeks of his imprisonment, we are told, the dark solitary cell induces

hallucinations. His own shadow keeps appearing and disappearing, getting up, walking around, and sitting down again (12). The reader soon discovers, however, that this detachment is illusory when the shadow assumes the same posture as Massala-Massala: that is, sitting down with "one hand to its cheek" (12). Massala-Massala himself intimates that, in this posture, he and the shadow seem as if they are "just one entity" with their fates "sealed forever" (12). Metaphorically put, they are opposite sides of the same ontological coin. Yet, when Massala-Massala searches his soul in the mirror of his conscience, an image of an intimidating man confronts him (134). Rather than recoil in fear, he holds out a hand to the man, implying both identification with and detachment from him (134). His fragmentation becomes more visible when we read that, by reaching out to the strange man, he, in fact, holds out a hand to himself (134). This hallucination continues when he studies his face in a pail filled with water in the prison courtyard. His features fluctuate and metamorphose in the bucket, and, once again, he discovers an alien man that frightens him (135). Ironically, Massala-Massala claims that he is this man, and he compares this reflection with that from the broken mirror (135). In all these cases, Massala-Massala cannot recognise himself, for he is undergoing a crisis of self-recognition.

Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* also locates this crisis of self-recognition in Massala-Massala's failure to dissociate himself from the shadows of Moki and Préfet, and so from their criminal influence as well. As he dozes off, he sees and recognises silhouettes of Moki and Préfet (13). Although the presence of these silhouettes underscores their physical disconnection from Massala-Massala, his rhetorical question "Do we remain connected even here?" ironically points to their psychological connection (14). Moreover, Massala-Massala believes he shares the same fate and aspirations with Moki because he persuaded him to come to Paris (22). However, when he asks himself why Moki is not in jail with him, their ontological differences begin to unravel.

The reader suddenly realises that, despite sharing the same French dream, Massala-Massala and Moki do not share the same fate at all. Massala-Massala's sense of self, it clearly follows, keeps shifting to and from Moki's criminal identity.

As with the postmodernist subject whose identity, as Malpas argues, is "infinitely mutable" rather than "based on some essential nature" (74), Massala-Massala performs the identity of Moki's shadow. This becomes apparent when he states that he is Moki's shadow, which the latter creates in his own migrant and criminal image (22). Massala-Massala then becomes Moki's willing "valet," and imagines himself to be just like his mentor (22, 70). A telling irony here, of course, is that Massala-Massala also imagines himself to be the exact opposite of his role model. He considers himself more enterprising and smarter than Moki, as is evident in his secret plan to build his parents a grocery and a more beautiful villa than the one the latter built for his parents (70). Accordingly, Massala-Massala operates on the principle of a disciple surpassing his master (71). As readers, we therefore gain a perplexing sense of his self's unstable attachment to and detachment from Moki's migrant and criminal identities.

This performative dimension of identity is further noticeable in Massala-Massala's fraudulent adoption of two names and identities with Préfet's help shortly after his arrival in Paris. Apart from Massala-Massala, he also goes by the names Marcel Bonaventure and Eric Jocelyn-George. While the use of these new names and identities is necessary for him to obtain fake residency permits, it nevertheless emphasises the fragmented nature of his subjectivity. Indeed, Njoya contends that Massala-Massala's loss of his original name triggers internal conflict and disconnected selfhood (352). Such ontological instability culminates in what Thomas describes as a deep identity crisis, which is a direct result of his physical alienation from Africa and from his initial identity (*Black France* 182).

The identity crisis that Njoya and Thomas speak of is particularly clear in Massala-Massala's ambivalence towards his adopted names and identities. He reveals that, despite Marcel Bonaventure not being his real name, he embraces it like the name Massala-Massala because he is "no longer just one person," but "several at the same time" (85). Curiously, though, his awareness of his different identities is rather contradictory, because he insists that he is split only in two even though he still does not know who he is anymore (84). We also witness such identity disorientation in his attachment to the new name to the extent that if he hears it in the streets, he automatically turns around, and ascribes this response to his "split personality" (85). Indeed, the performance of many identities splinters his selfhood to such an extent that there are multiple Massala-Massalas, rather than just any two recognisable ones.

This fact becomes visible when he relates to the real Marcel Bonaventure and Eric Jocelyn-George. Préfet secures two false identity cards for Massala-Massala by aligning his photos with the details of these two French nationals in order to buy transit coupons. That is why he knows that his doubles exist somewhere in Paris. What is postmodernist about Massala-Massala's performance of these identities is that, although he complains that they confuse him, he maintains that he is still Marcel Bonaventure and Eric Jocelyn-George (85). In other words, there are three Massala-Massalas, who are similar, yet different. As an Afrodiasporic writer, whose cultural entanglement renders him politically ambivalent towards both the local and the global, Mabanckou attributes Massala-Massala's fragmented identity not only to the corruption of French citizens, who facilitate the acquisition of fake identity cards, but also to his use of these identity cards to commit crime.

In *African Psycho*, Mabanckou presents the fragmentation of Grégoire's identity as the product of both the disorienting effects of the Congolese foster care system and his performance

of Angoualima's serial killer identity. Precisely in this thematic context, *African Psycho* draws the reader's attention to its intertextual relationship with its pretext entitled *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. In this American postmodernist novel, the protagonist, Patrick Bateman, is a Wall Street investment banker, who, notwithstanding his elite economic status, murders innocent people and keeps their dead bodies as trophies in his refrigerator. Both *African Psycho* and *American Psycho*, then, expose the different psychological effects of Western modernity in the American and African postcolonial contexts.

However, as a glocalised text, Mabanckou's *African Psycho* enacts the postmodernist critique of Western modernity differently from Ellis's *American Psycho*. According to Bran Nicol, Ellis is associated with a circle of American writers of the 1980s called "Generation X," whose novels portray and critique the psychological effects of the morally bankrupt, consumerist, celebrity-obsessed culture of late capitalism (197). For Nicol, such novels explore the fragmented subjectivity of young disaffected protagonists, who display a dearth of affect or emotion in their empty lives, as is the case of Bateman in *American Psycho*, whose serial murders are motiveless in nature (184, 197-98). While Ellis's *American Psycho* ascribes Bateman's fragmented subjectivity and criminality to the corrupting effects of materialism, Mabanckou's *African Psycho* suggests that Anguoalima and Grégoire are products and victims of such Western enforcement of capitalism in the Congolese postcolonial context. Accordingly, Bateman's actions are largely a function of middle-class Western boredom concomitant on easy affluence, whereas in the case of Mabanckou's protagonists it is a function of enforced modernity, and therefore the psychopathologies attendant on colonial history.

In *African Psycho*, Mabanckou focuses on how Grégoire's traumatic upbringing in the Congolese foster care system forces him to perform Angoualima's criminal identity and why this

association fragments his subjectivity even more. Throughout the novel, Grégoire identifies with his idol's ghost as a role model. He even perceives Angoualima as a parent, and therefore visits his ghost at the Dead-Who-Are-Not-Allowed-To-Sleep cemetery, claiming that his suicide leaves him as an orphan (2, 6). Despite this seemingly mutual association, both Grégoire and Angoualima are ambivalent towards each other's identity. As becomes apparent in their conversations, Angoualima habitually calls Grégoire "an imbecile, an idiot, or a pathetic character" and, instead of taking offence, the latter takes "these insults as a sign of the affection that only" his idol shows him (7). Equally ironic is the fact that, even though Grégoire realises that he can be a criminal without Angoualima's mentorship and approval, he lacks the willpower to do so. Mabanckou thus questions the capacity of foster parents as role models, since their cruelty eventually forces Grégoire to seek Angoualima's criminal guidance. At the same time, the novel problematises Grégoire's choice of Angoualima as a mentor, as this association further corrupts his moral development.

Mabanckou extends this postmodernist critique of subjectivity to Grégoire's perception of himself as Angoualima's double. The novel suggests that the performance of Angoualima's identity simultaneously stabilises and destabilises Grégoire's identity. In one sense, he claims to share with Angoualima the same criminal instincts, fate, and childhood (7-8). So, for instance, when a popular radio show insults Angoualima, Grégoire feels the pain deep inside, and he proceeds to exact a public apology on his double's behalf by disguising himself as one of the callers (52-3). Yet in another sense, Grégoire confesses that Angoualima is a father figure he does not want to know for fear of forever losing his identity (36). Malpas sees this radical disruption of self-consciousness as a characteristic of postmodernist subjects (79). What we indeed witness at

this point is that Angoualima provides Grégoire with a fatherly role model, even as this guiding role erodes his sense of identity by reducing him into an existential appendage.

It is for this reason that Grégoire also performs the identity of Angoualima's antagonist. Rather than identify with Angoualima as a double, he undermines the latter's criminal acts as an adversary. He states, for example, that he will not seek Angoualima's guidance in his plan to murder Germaine because it is his personal project, and not simply an imitation of his idol's serial killings (37). Even more categorically, he wants the execution of Germaine's murder to leave Angoualima speechless, surprised, and frightened (98). This show of criminal arrogance turns into open resentment when the mass media mistakenly credits to Angoualima Grégoire's attack on Fernandes Quiroga (a notary-real estate agent) and the extraction of the public apology from the presenters of the popular radio show (51, 57). When Angoualima ignores these cases of mistaken identity by not punishing all the perpetrators as he normally does, Grégoire even accuses him of ingratitude, and vows to stop shadowing him for the rest of his life (58).

While this vow emphasises Grégoire's refusal to be Angoualima's double, it nevertheless exposes his subconscious performance of this identity. If he does not want to be Angoualima's double anymore, it means that Grégoire sometimes perceives himself as one. He, in fact, admits that although he resents, even envies, the attribution of every crime to Angoualima, he believes that they are making history together as master and disciple (58). Moreover, on the night he assaults and fails to rape a nurse he mistakes for a prostitute, Grégoire is convinced that he is undergoing "consecration as unquestioned disciple of Angoualima" (77). At work here is the recurring indeterminacy of Grégoire's identity, for he perceives himself as both Angoualima's double and nemesis. In this respect, he resembles a postmodernist subject whose identity, according to Raymond Federman, is "illusory and unpredictable" (12).

In the African postcolonial context, however, Mabanckou treats the illusory and unpredictable nature of Grégoire's identity differently from a Western postmodernist writer. He draws on and parts company with the notion that postmodernism calls into question the liberal humanist idea of the individual self as natural and given by exposing the self's fragmented nature. While Mabanckou's *African Psycho* suggests that the illusory and unpredictable nature of Grégoire's identity is indeed a product of his conditions of existence in He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot, the novel also demonstrates that it is a direct consequence of his individual response to this specific environment. From this African postmodernist perspective, Mabanckou attributes Grégoire's illusory and unpredictable identity to both the disorienting effects of modern city conditions in postcolonial Congo and his choice of crime as a way of life.

We further notice this African postmodernist critique in *African Psycho* when Grégoire perceives himself as both a double and a foe of other criminals in He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot. As soon as he turns eighteen, he starts attending murder trials at the city's courthouse in order to learn how to perform criminality (30). He readily identifies with these murderers because the country's judicial system treats them as hopeless products of deprived childhood, just like the one he experiences in foster families. So, for example, in the trial of Ted Louko, who murders his wife in a fit of jealousy, a public prosecutor persuades the jury to believe that he is "a perpetual menace to society" because his childhood programmed him to kill (31), which is in itself an implied admission of the city's complicity in making him a criminal. The courthouse therefore becomes Grégoire's "place of worship," since it is where he associates with his criminal doubles to the point of shedding tears for them in identity solidarity (30). However, Mabanckou's novel suggests that, although the city's prejudices compel Grégoire to associate with fellow social

pariahs, this association is what fragments his identity. By having multiple criminal doubles, he subjects himself to a constant identity conflict.

Unsurprisingly, Grégoire later dissociates himself from the city's criminals because they undermine his identity as Angoualima's double. This ambivalence of identity becomes clear when he despises them for taking advantage of Angoualima's anonymity and elusiveness to commit crime, safe in the knowledge that the police will automatically attribute it to the country's most wanted assassin (52). This sense of alienation explains why he describes these criminals as "pathetic," "villains," and "scoundrels" (42). However, in condemning fellow criminals, Grégoire condemns his own criminal life. He reveals how his identity is the performance of the very identities he denounces. This ambivalent association with other criminals calls to mind Robert Briggs's assertion that the identity of a postmodernist subject is fluid, rather than fixed and unchanging (63-5).

Grégoire's confession that Angoualima has other doubles increases the fluidity of his identity because he continues to identify with criminals he keeps rejecting. From the African postmodernist point of view, Mabanckou simultaneously installs Grégoire's ontological connection to other criminals and subverts his claim to being Angoualima's only double. Grégoire himself tells us that Angoualima listens to the prayers of all criminals who follow in his footsteps (83). In fact, most criminals in He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot visit Angoualima's ghost at the Dead-Who-Are-Not-Allowed-To-Sleep cemetery to seek inspiration for their murderous intentions (85). Again, like Grégoire, even ordinary inhabitants of the city idolise Angoualima by secretly buying and keeping his photos (119). Angoualima's ghost itself acknowledges its mass worship when it censures Grégoire for being the one who visits it the most, but being the least

gifted (85). The inference, then, is that Angoualima and Grégoire are mutually ambivalent towards each other's identity.

The ontological consequence of this ambivalence is paradoxically twofold. For Grégoire to attain a sense of identity, he must perform the identity of Angoualima's double, and yet their ambivalent relationship as master and disciple interrupts this performance. Ultimately, as with the postmodernist subject, who, according to Hans Bertens, becomes multiple in an infinite process of becoming (12), Grégoire experiences perpetual ontological fragmentation. *African Psycho* exemplifies this infinite fragmentation of identity when Grégoire looks at himself in the mirror while waiting to kill Germaine, who, by this time, is cohabiting with him. Although the mirror is not broken as in Massala-Massala's case, Grégoire cannot recognise himself because he feels foreign to his own face (127). Instead of his face, however, he sees "Angoualima's face" (127), which suggests the interconnectedness of their identity. Moreover, Grégoire represses a sudden urge to break the mirror lest he disconnects himself from his idol, who exists deep within him (127). A telling irony is that the desire to break the mirror derives from the fear of seeing Angoualima's face because it points to the perpetual metamorphosis of his identity (131). It transpires that the mirror reflects two different faces, which Grégoire both owns and disowns.

This identity disorientation reaches its climax when Angoualima, towards the end of the novel, finally disowns Grégoire as his double for failing to murder Germaine. At this point, Mabanckou suggests that Grégoire's claim to be Angoualima's double has been an exercise in self-delusion. Angoualima particularly informs Grégoire that he "*will never be a criminal*" because he lacks the necessary personality and should therefore never come to see him again as a disciple (144-45; emphasis in original). What is more disorienting to Grégoire is Angoualima's choice of Germaine's real murderer (a railroad ticket collector and her compatriot) as a perfect double,

irrespective of his fewer visits to his burial site at the Dead-Who-Are-Not-Allowed-To-Sleep cemetery. *African Psycho* thus shows Grégoire's failure to perform the identity of a double, thereby reinforcing his own psychological fragmentation.

At the end of the novel, Grégoire himself concedes his lack of existential anchorage and reference, which is suggested by the fact that Angoualima's ghost physically abandons him in its ascension to heaven for judgment. He is certain that he will never see his idol again, as becomes evident when he cannot even recognise Angoualima's voice anymore (145). This ontological severance forces him to "sit down and cry on the grave" of his absent idol (145). By the time one finishes reading this last sentence, Grégoire is undergoing what Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker describe as a profound sense of ontological uncertainty, disunity, incoherence, and meaninglessness (199), which is typical of postmodernist characters.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that, in his presentation of the ontological status of Massala-Massala and Grégoire, Mabanckou enacts a postmodernist critique of Western modernity by exposing how social, political, and economic conditions in France and postcolonial Congo fragment the subjectivities of the two protagonists. He particularly locates these disorienting effects of modern urban life in the contradictions of the French immigration legislation and the Congolese foster care system. In their desperate efforts to survive and make sense of their existence, the two protagonists adopt conflicting identities, whose perpetual deferment, uncertainty, instability, and indeterminacy is beyond their own self-mastery and self-recognition. In both *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho*, then, Mabanckou suggests that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, it must also be a reaction against enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context.

Significantly, in this regard, Mabanckou's treatment of fragmented subjectivity in the two novels gestures towards his glocalised conception of both African and Western identities. Indeed, as an Afrodiasporic writer, Mabanckou's cultural entanglement between the local and the global renders him politically ambivalent towards both French modernity and its Congolese extension. Although he acknowledges the socio-economic significance of migration and foster care initiatives, he problematises their disorienting effects on the subjectivities of Congolese transnationals and orphans respectively. Accordingly, his status as a French-Congolese writer necessitates a nuanced use of postmodernism in order to capture the complexity of simultaneously installing and subverting the social, political, and economic assumptions and conventions of the two countries from within. The resulting ideological and cultural tension that accompanies the colonial encounter between France and the Republic of Congo indeed demonstrates the localisation of a postmodernist aesthetic in his African postcolonial writing.

Chapter Three: Narrative Experimentation in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*

Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* display run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs in ways that violate the grammatical and literary conventions of the French language in which the novels were originally published, and even those of their English translations. What is additionally striking is that the two novels have the same surrogate author, who uses different names and personae. In *Broken Glass*, the surrogate author is the titular Broken Glass, the 62-year-old alcoholic and former primary school teacher from the Congolese town of Trois-Cents, who, before his suicide at the end of the novel, leaves behind a manuscript, entitled *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, in which his surrogate author is the 42-year-old male porcupine called Ngoumba, the serial killer double of the Congolese man named Kibandi. Both novels evince Mabanckou's narrative experimentation, and the chapter that follows seeks to examine how and why this mode of writing suggests the possibility of a postcolonial postmodernism, as well as its socio-political implications and relevance in the African context.

As previously noted in this thesis, postmodernist writers engage in different forms of narrative experimentation as an aesthetic departure from the realist tradition and an extension of some modernist strategies. So, for example, in his influential study entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard describes a postmodernist writer in the following manner:

> A postmodernist artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he [or she] writes, the work he [or she] produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art

itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. (81; emphasis in original)

What is tellingly clear from this argument is that a postmodernist aesthetic aligns itself with, and in the process incorporates, principles of avant-garde experimentation, thereby breaking with the representational conventions of realism in terms of, for example, point of view, narrative sequence, and layout. As Pam Morris maintains, Lyotard's postrealist stance proceeds from his critique of the ideological and aesthetic conservatism of the mimetic tradition of the early 20th century, which is characterised by the nostalgic desire for a world of moral certainties and experiential coherence that can be represented as a totality (30). In the spirit of avant-gardism, however, postmodernist writers, like their modernist predecessors, experiment with form and point of view, for they see, and therefore represent, the world as fragmentary, unstable, and indeterminate.

This sort of stylistic experimentation, according to Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo, is one of the defining characteristics of African postmodernist novels (330), which is what this present chapter will demonstrate to be at work in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. In particular, I shall show how run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs exemplify what Brian McHale describes as the postmodernist strategy of manipulating the material resources of the printed book (*Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* 9), or what Ronald Sukenick describes as the technological reality of the novel ("The New Tradition" 205). Unlike Kenzo, McHale, and Sukenick, whose arguments relate specifically to style, I shall demonstrate that Mabanckou's narrative experimentation is not just a matter of style: it facilitates, indeed forms part of, a critique of modernity.

Importantly, in this regard, Evan Mwangi, in his article eponymously entitled "Experimental Fictions," traces the history of African experimental writing from the 1980s. In it, Mwangi makes a telling point that:

> Rather than bemoan cultural contamination by the West or displacement into foreign lands […] the new generation has celebrated the transformative possibilities of new hybrid identities that transplantation promises. Their embrace of border-crossing is reflected in their use of fluid narrative techniques that subversively mix languages, genres, races, and gender category more than did preceding authors. (445)

As this passages makes clear, African experimental writing is a product of the cultural entanglement that is generated when local and global aesthetics intersect, whether due to the colonial encounter or migration. For this reason, hybridity is not simply a neat combination of different identities or literary traditions, but rather a complex and perpetual oscillation between and among each other. Moreover, if the novel itself is originally a Western genre, then African experimental novels are inevitably glocalised artefacts.

What is counterintuitive, and therefore problematic, in Mwangi's argument is his divorce of African experimental fiction from Western postmodernism. This conceptual contradiction becomes more pronounced particularly in a section titled "Experimenting outside Western Postmodernism," where Mwangi seems to uphold two conflicting positions. On the one hand, Mwangi draws on Helen Tiffin's anti-imperialist argument that to equate postcolonial non-realist literature with Western postmodernism is to reinforce a neo-universalisation which the decolonisation project undermines and circumvents (448). On the other hand, though, Mwangi adopts Kwame Anthony Appiah's contention that, while postcolonial novels are not postmodern in the strict sense of the word as used in the Western academy, African writers employ postrealist

techniques of modernism and postmodernism to critique not only Western imperialism, but also the betrayal of nationalism by the continent's ruling elite (448). Indeed, if, as I have repeatedly emphasised, postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context.

In this connection, it is important that Gerald Gaylard traces the transition of the African novel from realism, modernism, and magical realism to the current experimental writing of postcolonial postmodernism ("African Realism" 276-77). Of more socio-political relevance, in this specific regard, is modernism's aesthetic experimentation, which expresses disillusionment with the instrumental rationality of Western modernity in all its capitalist and imperialistic manifestations, especially the tendency to conventionalise literary production and its form. Such modernist experimentation, argues David I. Ker, offered early African writers the ideological framework through which to tackle the effects of colonialism (1-2). Mwangi adds that the modernist aesthetic allowed African writers to articulate "a general disappointment with the post-independence dispensation in new African nations that were already beset with corruption and other governance problems" (448). By implication, then, decolonisation is not a one-sided affair, but a multifaceted project, for, in dismantling hidden and unhidden forms of Western imperialism, African writers expose various aspects of local complicity.

A momentous case in point is Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), in which the Nigerian author exposes the disruptive effects of colonialism on his Igbo culture by drawing on William Butler Yeats' modernist poem entitled "The Second Coming," whose apocalyptic imagery and cataclysmic tenor lament the fragmentation of postwar Europe. However, in presenting characters who subscribe to both indigenous and European missionary values, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, like its successor *Arrow of God*, suggests that the colonial encounter

initiated a glocalisation process, which undermines any notion of cultural or identity purity. Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Matigari* (1986) criticise the corrupt practices of both the Kenyan ruling elite and their Western accomplices, thereby expressing the disillusionment with independence and other attendant problems, namely dictatorship and poverty. Quite evidently, then, African literature has undergone glocalisation shifts from social realism to the experimental impulse of modernism and postmodernism.

One result of this aesthetic glocalisation is the overlap between European and African languages. Due to the political tensions that accompany colonial history, however, this linguistic entanglement is characterised by conflict. In tracing the genesis of this conflict, Chantal Zabus, in "The Novel Writes Back, Sideways, and Forward: The Question of Language in African Fiction," draws on the sociolinguistic term of glottophagia (the devouring of languages), and argues that this phenomenon is "a consequence of European colonial language policies which repressed the teaching and, to various degrees, the reading and writing of the indigenous African languages" (483). Not surprisingly, though, glottophagia is a glocalisation mechanism, insofar as it constitutes a transcultural nexus between indigenous African languages and European ones. Tellingly, in this regard, Zabus notes that, since the 1980s, there has been a linguistic coexistence between African literature in local languages and African literature in European languages, which implies that the relationship between the languages from the two continents and their literary productions is "less glottophagic than in colonial times" (483).

This linguistic entanglement, then, calls into question the binarist claims and practices of both Western imperialism and African decolonisation. For in imposing its European languages on Africa, colonialism opened them up to indigenisation and, by the same token, in localising European languages, Africans invested their indigenous languages with a colonial dimension.

More importantly, Zabus argues that "literary decolonisation in Africa" is necessarily grounded in the indigenisation process, "in that novelists seek to convey concepts, thought patterns, and even linguistic features of the mother tongue in the European language" (486). As a result, African authors "write with an accent" (486), which is to say both a given mother tongue and the European one undermine each other's linguistic purity, but reinforce their complex reciprocity.

In a related glocalisation context, indigenisation is informed by another linguistic process which Zabus, in *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*, calls relexification. By relexification, Zabus means the forging of a new register of communication out of an alien lexicon and other related linguistic features like morphology, semantics, syntax, and phonetics within the same text (112). Zabus argues that in a text in which English or French has been relexified, what appears on the page is an unfamiliar European language that constantly suggests an indigenous tongue (113-14). In the African postcolonial context, various manifestations of relexification are thus forms of writing back to the colonial empire through the medium of its own languages. Indeed, Zabus contends that even though African writers "do not use the word," they "recognise that relexification is at work when they write novels in European languages" ("The Novel Writes Back" 448), thereby rendering decolonisation a glocalised rather than a binarist project, which undermines Western imperialism from within its assumptions and practices.

This is especially true of postmodernist writing in the sub-Saharan region which, according to Zabus, deploys the strategy of dealing with the tyranny of colonial languages by blending them with local languages so that they carry the burden of African cultures ("Postmodernism in African Literature" 465). Kenzo similarly argues that African postcolonial writing breaks the rules of European languages in order to create indigenous rhythms and expressions of orality, although he

associates this experimentation with the formal deconstructive strategies of postmodernism, rather than with an ideological critique of colonialism and post-independence disillusionment (330). Since I contend that narrative experimentation is both formal and ideological, this chapter will focus on the power dynamic that inheres in the interplay between French (and English) and native Congolese languages, and why this fusion enacts a postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism in the African postcolonial context.

Despite French being the official language of the Republic of Congo, the country has more than forty indigenous Bantu languages, among which Munukutuba and Lingala are also spoken nationally. Importantly, Mabanckou explains to Binyavanga Wainaina, in the 2010 interview, that he only learnt to speak French when he was six years old because he previously spoke Congolese languages like Bembé, Lingala, Laari, Munukutuba, and Vili, which are all oral (32). While Mabanckou acknowledges the official status of French, he later exposes the contradictions underlying its colonial imposition. He argues that although the French people accuse the Congolese people of being ungrateful for receiving the French language as one of the benefits of colonialism, the French colonisers "didn't want to give" their language to the Congolese, and that is why they "*took* it from them" (35; emphasis in original).

Mabanckou's rather counterintuitive argument requires some clarification here. What does he really mean by saying that the Congolese people took the French language from their former colonisers when it is historically obvious that it was imposed on them? It would seem that Mabanckou is referring to two different versions of French within the Congolese context. As with most colonial languages, French is premised on the binarist logic of regarding its normative dialect as superior and its variants as inferior. This, in fact, is the linguistic racialisation that Mabanckou

problematises when he reveals that the normative French identity, among other things, involves speaking French without an African accent (35).

What we witness here, as I have pointed out earlier, is the interrogation of colonialism as a humanitarian and philanthropic project. By imposing French on the Congolese people and yet reducing its local dialect to an inferior status, the colonisers exemplify what Achille Mbembe criticises as the West's exclusionary and inhumane treatment of its others, particularly the African postcolony:

> It is now widely acknowledged that Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world. In several respects, Africa still constitutes one of the metaphors through which the West represents the origin of its own norms, develops a self-image, and integrates this image into the set of signifiers asserting what it supposes to be its identity. (2)

What is tellingly clear in this passage is the fact that, if the West's self-image cannot exist without reference to Africa's alterity, the two continents are culturally entangled in ways that problematise any binarist polarisation of their values, identity, and languages. It is exactly this glocalised relationship between France and the Republic of Congo that Mabanckou's narrative experimentation in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* foregrounds by depicting the French language from the two countries as mutually derivative of and contingent on each other.

My reference to Congolese languages in this chapter focuses on their collective fast-paced accent, which contrasts sharply with the slow accent of French, and, by extension, of English, and also, through its vernacular rhythm, destabilises the two European languages from within their grammatical and literary conventions. As Simon During argues in "Postmodernism or Post-

colonialism Today," the question of language in postcolonial spaces is political, cultural, and literary, since to speak or write in imperial tongues is to call forth the problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence (43). I shall therefore pay close attention to the subversive indigenisation of French and the resulting formal and ideological implications in the Congolese postcolonial context.

Central to Mabanckou's narrative experimentation in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, then, is what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin describe as appropriation and abrogation, two related terms referring to the adaptation of colonial languages and rejection of their normative dialects in the writing of postcolonial fiction (*Postcolonial Studies* 4). The significance of these postcolonial writing strategies, as they further argue, lies in the fact that, since colonialism was mediated by the imposition of European languages on other cultures, language has been a fundamental site of ideological conflict between the postcolonial and the Western world (*Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 283). In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o similarly notes that given that language is crucial in a people's self-definition, it remains the bone of contention between Western imperialism and African decolonisation (4). For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, it is therefore an ideological necessity for postcolonial writing to define itself by abrogating and appropriating colonial languages into discourses that are fully attuned to local experiences (*Empire Writes Back* 37).

By implication, then, linguistic decolonisation in the African postcolony is a glocalised rather than a binarist project. Indeed, in appropriating and abrogating European languages, African writers do not only write back to the imperial centres, but also gesture towards the glocalised state of their own languages, identities, and values. That is, the colonial encounter between Africa and the West engendered, and continues to necessitate, the perpetual process of localising the global,

in which African indigenous languages become enmeshed with European ones, not in the traditional understanding of hybridity as a simple syncretism of transcultural products, but rather as a complex reciprocity. In this glocalisation understanding, the indigenisation and relexification of European languages indeed serve as subversive mechanisms of the broader decolonisation project of appropriation and abrogation.

I therefore argue that Mabanckou's experimentation with run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* enables a postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism. Proceeding from this premise, I shall show how run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs infuse French (and English) with a disruptive Congolese vernacular accent, which ultimately subverts their colonial supremacy. As Zabus indeed argues, when the empire writes back to the colonial centre, it does so with an accent, rather than with vengeance, by inscribing postcolonial language variants in the text (*African Palimpsest* xv). The inference here is that although Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* were originally written in French and then translated into English, they still evince the interference of the fast-paced accent of Congolese languages. The ontological effect of this perpetual tension is that, even though we see French (and English) words on the pages, we constantly perceive the fictional projection of the phonetic and syntactical traces of Congolese languages. What one encounters in the two novels, then, is what F. Abiola Irele, in *The African Imagination*, describes as African literature whose distinctive mark is the need to attain the condition of oral expression even within the boundaries established by Western literary conventions (19).

The Art of Subversive Punctuation: No Full Stops, Commas only

Having narratives that follow each other and which have been written by the same surrogate author using different names and personae, *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* present throughout

Mabanckou's postmodernist experimentation with punctuation, particularly his subversive use of run-on commas. Intriguingly, the evidence of this subversive punctuation emerges in the appendix of *Memoirs of a Porcupin*e, which contains a letter by the Stubborn Snail concerning the origin of the novel's manuscript. As noted in the first chapter, the Stubborn Snail is Broken Glass's best friend, who persuades him to write *Broken Glass* in order to record the stories of customers at his bar called Credit Gone West. In this letter, the Stubborn Snail does not only submit the posthumous manuscript of *Memoirs of a Porcupin*e to the publishers of *Broken Glass*, but also informs them of the difficulties he encountered in assembling the manuscript the foremost being the indecipherable nature of Broken Glass's handwriting, which is largely due to the fact that run-on commas are the only form of punctuation that he has used.

In a self-reflexive gesture, Mabanckou himself reveals the ideological motivation behind such subversive punctuation. He explains to Wainaina, in the 2010 interview, that he uses the comma throughout *Broken Glass* for two main reasons. First, the colonial imposition of French as the official language in his native Republic of Congo ruled out the possibility of learning literature in local languages and, as a result, when he became a writer, he could not write very polished fiction that respects the rules of the French academy (32). Secondly, he is inspired by French writers like Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who demonstrate that it is possible to break the rules of the French academy in order to create narrative effects (32). One such effect is the rhythm of the prose in both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, which is "like the Congolese way of speaking," a grammatical violation which Mabanckou celebrates as "a way of dealing with the French" (32).

Curiously, in his 2012 interview with Helen Stevenson, Mabanckou provides rather apolitical reasons for the use of run-on commas in the two novels. So, for example, he claims that he uses commas but no full stops in *Broken Glass* in order to capture the narrator's continuous

drunken talk (12). His assumption seems to be that a drunkard speaks non-stop and fast, and that the narrative representation of this rhythm should necessarily dispense with full stops. To press home his point, Mabanckou refers to *African Psycho*, *Broken Glass*'s predecessor, in which the psychopathic protagonist, Grégoire Nabomakoyo, talks non-stop when angry, and, in the pages where he does this, his train of thought is punctuated only by commas (13). While run-on commas illustrate the drunken and angry rhythms in the two novels, not everyone in these emotional states speaks fast, as becomes clear in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, in which the surrogate author recounts his regrettable life of magic to a baobab tree, but certainly not in angry or drunken mood, even though his narrative is also punctuated by run-on commas. My point here is that, despite Mabanckou's assertions, his use of run-on commas in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* still reflect the political relexification of French (and English) to which he refers in the earlier interview with Wainaina.

Indeed, as an inheritor of both Congolese indigenous languages and French, Mabanckou performs a postmodernist critique of Western modernity's claim that the imposition of colonial languages on other cultures is a civilising mission, since, quite on the contrary, it is a blatant demonstration of linguistic imperialism. That is, by imposing the French language on Congolese people and yet marginalising its localised version, French colonialism precludes any transcultural reciprocity and, in doing so, exposes its ideological double standards. In other words, French colonialism is caught up in the contradiction of its own binarist tendencies, namely the French language cannot escape both its implication in and coexistence with its Congolese version. As glocalised texts, then, *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* deploy subversive punctuation in order to reinstate the accent of Congolese languages, thereby undermining the linguistic imperialism of French (and English) from within. Moreover, as Mabanckou explains to Stevenson,

Broken Glass is influenced by Céline's novels, whose broken French projects a vulgar effect that is quite unusual among French classical writers (12).

Unlike Céline, however, Mabanckou invests his broken French with a political critique. Although he uses this European language in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou nevertheless exposes its imperialistic and racialised dimensions. As noted earlier, this is the political ambivalence that characterises African postmodernism as a glocalised aesthetic practice. As a politically ambivalent writer, then, Mabanckou inflects postmodernism with an African postcolonial agency in order to critique the colonial imposition of French (and English) both from within their grammatical and literary conventions.

This postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism suggests that French (and English) are bound up with colonial ideologies. To the extent that these two languages are instruments of Western imperialism, they reinforce its underlying cultural dominants. Indeed, as Frantz Fanon contends in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to speak a language is not merely to use its syntax and morphology, but is, above all, to inherit a culture embedded within the grammatical structures of that particular language (8). Ngugi likewise points out that language carries culture and, through its oral history and literature, an accompanying value system as well (16). In retrieving the vernacular accent of Congolese languages from French (and English), Mabanckou thus relexifies the two colonial languages without necessarily adopting their ideological assumptions. In postmodernist terms, it would seem he is simultaneously legitimising and undermining the usage of French (and English), but typically from the African postcolonial perspective.

Mabanckou's postmodernist ambivalence towards French (and English) contributes to the language debate in African literature, which dates back to the 1962 conference of African writers of English expression at Makerere University in Uganda. The conference produced two opposing

camps in response to the question whether African literature should be written in European or indigenous languages. Notably, Achebe, and to a lesser extent Gabriel Okara, accepted European languages, but in altered forms that carry the burden of African experiences and their native expressions. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe argues that English, notwithstanding its imperialistic roots, is a global medium of communication, and so can be altered to suit African experiences and their contexts (61-2). Similarly, Okara maintains that it is possible for an African writer to translate literally his or her traditional ideas, philosophy, folklore, and imagery into any European language in order to imbue it with a local character (15). Implicit in Achebe's and Okara's arguments, then, is a common affirmation of linguistic glocalisation.

Contrary to the ambivalent tone of Achebe and Okara, Ngugi and Obiajunwa Wali rejected the use of European languages in the writing of African literature. For Ngugi, to adopt European languages is to enrich them precisely because they would end up preying on the attributes of native languages like folklore and proverbs, and not the other way around as Achebe and Okara seem to suggest (7-8). Apart from their impoverishment of local languages, Ngugi rejects European languages because they facilitate the cultural, mental, economic, and political subjugation of Africans (16). Likewise, Wali argues that until African literature is written in indigenous languages, instead of French and English, the continent's writers will be pursuing a dead end, which leads to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration (14). What Ngugi and Wali overlook, though, is the entangled nature of African and European languages, for they derive from, and are thus shaped by, the same colonial encounter, and that, for this reason, they cannot exist in strictly binarist terms.

Rather than align himself with either of these diametrically opposed positions, Mabanckou situates his narrative experimentation in the liminal space between the two from which he both

installs and subverts the acceptance and the rejection of European languages. On the one hand, his subversive use of run-on commas, which infuses the European languages with the Congolese accent, is seemingly consistent with the call to alter these non-African languages so that they carry the weight of the continent's experiences and expressions in a manner similar to the use of Igbo proverbs in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ijaw expressions in Okara's *The Voice*. On the other hand, however, Mabanckou's unconventional punctuation in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* undermines Achebe's proposal to maintain the grammatical purity of English as a universal medium of communication in loan translations (61-2), for the cultural entanglement that proceeds from the aesthetic practice of localising the global renders such linguistic purity untenable.

Mabanckou evinces a similar postmodernist ambivalence towards Amos Tutuola's loan translation of Yoruba folktales into broken English, which Achebe and Zabus ascribe to a lack of formal education, rather than to subversive experimentation (61; *African Palimpsest* 122). Although Mabanckou informs us in his interview with Wainaina that *Broken Glass* is influenced by Tutuola's broken English in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (33), the relexification effects in the two novels differ considerably. In the former, run-on commas increase the relexification effect, while in the latter broken English reduces it by creating a pidginisation effect. According to Zabus, the relationship between relexification and pidginisation is one of inverse proportion in the sense that the former is more recurrent than the latter in novels with a local or rural setting and vice versa (*African Palimpsest* 119). What this implies is that the relexification of French (and English) in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* is politically motivated, rather than a mere exercise in orality.

Whereas Mabanckou also calls into question the uncritical acceptance of European languages, as Ngugi and Wali do, his political ambivalence suggests that it is more ideologically

pragmatic to subvert colonial languages from within than to reject them. The point here is that European languages, as a matter of historical fact, are officially entrenched in Africa as mediums of education and social intercourse, a prevailing reality that effectively precludes their immediate abolition. The only viable option, so it appears, is to appropriate and abrogate European languages through indigenisation and relexification. To this end, Mabanckou's use of run-on commas in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* subverts French (and English) from within their grammatical and literary conventions. What is therefore at work in these glocalised texts is the fact that postmodernism's characteristic installation and undermining of the conventions and ideologies of Western modernity takes the form of an undermining of the European languages it installs in Mabanckou's writing.

As surrogate authors, then, Broken Glass and the porcupine enact Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism. In fact, their subversive experimentation with run-on commas in the two novels blurs the ontological boundary between French (and English) and Congolese languages. This linguistic relationship closely resembles what McHale, in *Postmodernist Fiction*, describes as an ontological flicker or opposition between the text as the real-world object and the fictional objects and world it projects, which occurs when the boundaries between the two realms collapse or are violated (180). The ontological corollary of this postmodernist strategy in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is that the two European languages and Congolese languages fuse into a perpetual flux. In other words, what appears on the pages of Mabanckou's novels are French (and English) words, but the accent they project is that of Congolese languages.

In *Broken Glass*, this disorienting ontological flicker is evident in the novel's second part, which shifts attention from the customers at Credit Gone West to the surrogate author himself,

especially to his dismissal from his teaching job at Trois-Martyrs School. In language lessons, we are told, Broken Glass teaches his students to disregard French grammatical rules, as emerges in his confession:

> I would tell them that what mattered in the French language was not the rules, but the exceptions to the rules, I would tell them that if they could understand, and memorize all the exceptions in this language, which was as changeable as the weather, then the rules would automatically become apparent, they would be obvious from first principles, and when they were grown up they could forget all about the rules and the sentence structure, because by then they would see that the French language isn't a long, quiet river, but rather a river to be diverted. (122)

Broken Glass's confession undermines the colonial hierarchy of normative French accent over its local Congolese version. As I have shown, Mabanckou problematises this racialised compartmentalisation of different versions of the same French language by subverting it from within its grammatical rules. Not surprisingly, then, Broken Glass even encourages his pupils to master the exceptions, rather than the rules, since, in this way, they will not only automatically make the rules apparent, but will also discover that the French language is susceptible to grammatical subversion.

This subversive attitude finds further expression in his confession that education authorities accused him of failing to "speak or pronounce French properly" during a pedagogical training workshop (122). Here, *Broken Glass* reminds us of the Lyotardian argument that a postmodernist writer violates familiar rules because he or she formulates his or her own familiar rules (81), suggesting that what we, as a rule, regard as familiar rules are, in fact, unfamiliar to his or her experimentation. In Mabanckou's novel, this constant play with familiar and unfamiliar rules

causes a recurring ontological tension between the materiality of written French (and English) words on the page and their fictional projection of the spoken rhythm of Congolese languages.

As with African postmodernist novels, which, according to Zabus, are palimpsests that retain the erased remnants of indigenous languages behind the scriptural authority of colonial languages ("Postmodernism in African Literature" 465), *Broken Glass* simultaneously installs and disrupts the ontological demarcations between French (and English) and the fast-paced intonation of Congolese languages. Seen in this light, Mabanckou's novel exemplifies postmodernism's political ambivalence, which follows from the fact that it critiques cultural dominants within which it inescapably exists. Since he is a politically ambivalent writer, it is not surprising that Mabanckou enacts a postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism in the African postcolonial context through the subversive inscription of run-on commas in his novel.

This postmodernist ambivalence towards French (and English) becomes even more apparent when Mabanckou's surrogate author self-reflexively comments on the grammar of the notebook he is writing, which, in a metaleptic transgression of ontological levels, is the novel that the reader happens to be reading. In his metafictional reflection, Broken Glass imagines himself as a novelist in these subversive terms:

> if I was a writer I would […] write something remotely like real life, but I'd say it in my own words, twisted words, incoherent words, nonsensical words, I'd write down words as they came to me, I'd begin awkwardly and I'd finish as awkwardly as I'd begun, and to hell with pure reason, and method, and phonetics, and prose, and in this shit-poor language of mine things would seem clear in my head but come out wrong […] and what I really want people to say when they read me is "what's this jumble, this mess, this muddle, this mishmash of barbarities, this empire of signs, this chitchat, this descent to the dregs of

belles lettres, what's with this barnyard prattle, is this stuff for real, and where does it start, and where the hell does it end?" (129)

What becomes clear from this passage is that, in his imagination, Broken Glass advocates a subversive form of prose that deliberately violates conventional narratological methods and, with them, French phonetics and syntax. At the same time, his unconventional prose distinguishes him from well-known and arrogant writers in Trois-Cents, who brag about their fiction on television (128-29). Indeed, although he only imagines himself writing this way, we, in fact, see that he is doing so in his notebook through his ungrammatical use of run-on commas. Moreover, the name "Broken Glass" and the putative title of the novel we are reading now exist in a metaleptic short-circuiting of their ontological divide, which generates the metafictional illusion that the subversive writing in the notebook is the subversive writing in the novel.

Quite tellingly, this is the subversive attitude that Mabanckou himself demonstrates in the interview with Stevenson, by arguing that he refuses to write in the classical way because he does not want to be a slave to the grammatical rules of the French academy (14). As I have already noted, Mabanckou contends that the ontological consequence of this relexification act is that although *Broken Glass* is written in French, it does not follow the rules of the French academy and, therefore, its rhythm is not French, but Congolese (14).

In Mabanckou's novel, the surrogate author shows a similar postmodernist ambivalence towards English, as becomes apparent when he describes Holden, a new white member of Credit Gone West and a former American student, who demands to be included as a character in his narrative. We read that Holden brings a book to the bar, whose English title prompts the narrator to disclose his inability to speak this European language (150). Moreover, when Holden insists on his inclusion in the notebook, the surrogate author denies that he does not want to waste time with

people who read books written in English (151). That the narrator resents English because it is not his mother tongue and yet speaks French, which is also not an indigenous Congolese tongue, indicates his ambivalence towards European languages in general. From this, it becomes clear that *Broken Glass*, like postmodernism, which uses and abuses conventions of discourse in the West, uses and abuses French (and English) in the African postcolonial context.

Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism through subversive punctuation intensifies towards the end of the novel, especially when the narrator hands over the completed notebook to the Stubborn Snail. After a second scan of the notebook, however, the Stubborn Snail complains about its punctuation and syntax as follows:

> I didn't look properly the first time, but it's a real mess, this book, there are no full stops, only commas, sometimes speech marks when someone's talking, that's not right, I think you should tidy it up a bit, don't you, how am I supposed to read all that, if it's all run together like that, you need to leave some spaces, a few breathing places, some pauses. (159)

While the Stubborn Snail's complaint mostly concerns the readability of the notebook, it is an implicit reinforcement of French grammar, as the phrase "that's not right" suggests. Ironically, though, his complaint is couched in ungrammatical language. He thus misses the fact that Broken Glass is politically ambivalent towards French, and that he therefore uses and abuses its grammar at the same time. As Zabus puts it, what is at issue in this power dynamic is the case of non-native speakers of French or English creating their own indigenous grammars so as to circumvent the cultural assumptions within such colonial languages (*African Palimpsest* xii). In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*, then, run-on commas perform a relexification function, which is to say they initiate

a continuous ontological tension between written French (and English) and the spoken rhythm of Congolese languages.

Memoirs of a Porcupine, which too is putatively written by Broken Glass, but through the surrogate authorship of Ngoumba, the 42-year-old porcupine, also foregrounds this linguistic glocalisation. As the title of the novel suggests, the porcupine is writing a memoir in the form of a confession to the baobab tree following the death of its human double and master, Kibandi. In commenting on this specific novel, Mabanckou explains to Wainaina that, according to Congolese myth (and probably most African myths), any human being is born with his or her animal double or totem, which can be harmful or peaceful, and that they live the same life together and die on the same day (34). In the novel, however, the porcupine survives the death of Kibandi, and is narrating their life of witchcraft, which has claimed almost ninety people in the Congolese village of Sekepembe.

The relexification effect of run-on commas in the porcupine's narrative, like that of Broken Glass, is evident in the disruption of the ontological boundary between written French (and English) words on the page and the fast-paced Congolese accent in the fictional world. Mabanckou's *Memoirs of a Porcupine* thus engages the reader in the process of constantly navigating between the materiality of French (and English) words and the fictional projection of the Congolese accent, thereby unsettling any notion of the neat ontological boundary between these two sets of languages. At the beginning of his confession to the baobab tree, for instance, Ngoumba promises to pause and take a few deep breaths (14). These pauses, it would seem to follow, presumably correspond with full stops in the narrative. However, when the narrative proceeds with more run-on commas, the reader suddenly realises that the porcupine's promise is,

in fact, a lie, which, in turn, interrupts the ontological awareness of French (and English) words and the non-stop rhythm of Congolese languages.

In Mabackou's novel, the disorienting function of run-on commas and their subversive effect unfolds both in the porcupine's awareness of French (and English) grammars and in his intentional violation of these rules. A telling instance is when he apologises to the baobab tree for having learnt to speak in a rambling and digressive manner from Sekepembe people, who talk non-stop as in opening brackets, but never closing them (101). However, what is ironic here is that, instead of abiding by the grammatical rules he endorses, Ngoumba continues to speak with the fast-paced Congolese accent, which subverts standard French (and English) altogether. It is in this broad sense of writing back to the colonial empire using relexified forms of French (and English) that Mabanckou's *Memoirs of a Porcupine* localises in the African postcolonial context the idea that postmodernism works within conventions which it seeks to subvert.

The Politics of Space: Block Paragraphs and Blank Spaces

Although Mabanckou acknowledges his narrative experimentation with run-on commas in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, he does not mention the use of blank spaces and block paragraphs and their subversive effect on French (and English). In this section of my chapter, I shall show that blank spaces and block paragraphs enact the postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism by undermining the formal conventions of realism that are associated with the colonial imposition of written literature in French (and English). As earlier argued, the African postcolony, following the disillusionment with independence and the formal limitations of social realism, has, from the late 1960s onwards, been characterised by the localisation of the experimental strategies associated with Western modernist and postmodernist writing.

What is implied in this transition is the radical transformation of realist strategies, whose origin is associated with the emergence of the traditional novel in eighteenth century Europe. According to Ian Watt, the rise of the English novel can be traced to the pioneering influence of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding and, more importantly, that the novels of these writers coincided with, and were therefore characterised by, realist principles in both their literary and philosophical dimensions (5-6). However, as already noted, these traditional conventions of the novel have undergone radical changes since the revolutionary effect of the avant-garde movement in the early 1900s from which modernism and postmodernism derive their experimental aesthetics.

One such radical transformation is the experimentation with language and form. Before the advent of the linguistic turn in the 1960s, realism, through the positivist logic of the Enlightenment tradition, advocated the referential function of language as a transparent window on or mirror to reality, which effectively implied its secondary role, for it was held that a phenomenon pre-existed its representation (see, for example, Morris 24; Gaylard "African Realism" 280). By subordinating language in this way, contends Bran Nicol, realism attempts to sustain the illusion that the fictional world is an objective and accurate representation of the real one (18). This mimetic illusion, however, is what postmodernist fiction, based on the anti-humanist notion that language constitutes reality, lays bare. As already indicated, postmodernism's incredulity towards realism proceeds from the core principle that reality cannot be objectively and accurately represented as it really is, but only its versions because the process of representation itself involves the subjective use of human-constructed words, sounds, pictures, and images that are subject to variation and approximation.

Of theoretical significance at this juncture is Callum G. Brown's argument about postmodernist representation. If, as he argues, mimesis is inherently subjective and inaccurate, then no single authoritative account of reality is tenable, and what we ultimately get are texts, not reality in its entirety (7). From this perspective, Nicol points out that representation cannot be performed unselfconsciously, and, for this reason, postmodernism is ambivalent towards realism, rather than rejecting it outright (19, 23). Not surprisingly, then, postmodernist fiction employs different experimental strategies that subvert the narrative layout and sequence of realist fiction. A telling example here is what Sukenick calls the technological spatialisation of form into the concrete structures of pages, print, and binding, which undermines realism's denial of the text's technological reality through sequential organisation of plot and narrative (204-5). Drawing upon Sukenick's insight, McHale similarly argues that the conspicuous manipulation of the material elements of the printed book in postmodernist fiction is an act of subversion against realist fiction because it suppresses or neutralises the text's interaction with the written word on the page by conventionalising space out of existence (*Postmodernist Fiction* 180-82).

This is the postmodernist subversion of the narrative layout and sequence of realist fiction that the reader notices in Mabanckou's narrative experimentation with blank spaces and block paragraphs in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. In fact, Mabanckou's block paragraphs violate the familiar and predictable paragraphing format, while blank spaces expose the unorthodox spacing-out of extremely short and irregular paragraphs separated by wide bands of white space, both of which, according to McHale, are typical experimental techniques of postmodernist writing (181-82). In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the manipulation of space involves the extra strategy of unusual indentation of some paragraph openings. Taken together, these experimental strategies result in what McHale describes as a shaped typography or concrete prose,

in which shapes imitate shapes of processes or objects in the real world (184). For McHale, the narrative effect of concrete prose is precisely the aforementioned ontological opposition or flicker between the text as a real-world object and the fictional world and objects it projects (180).

In the African postcolonial context, however, Mabanckou's concrete prose enacts not only the postmodernist subversion of realist formal conventions, but also a political critique of linguistic imperialism. Since language is embedded with different forms of culture, as Fanon and Ngugi previously argue, Mabanckou's experimentation with blank spaces and block paragraphs undermines the imposition of French (and English) as mediums of literary instruction in colonial education. In other words, *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* set up an ontological opposition between European and Congolese languages in which what we see on the pages is prose fiction written in European language, but its concrete structures, deriving from the ungrammatical use of run-on commas and the postrealist inscription of blank spaces and block paragraphs, resemble the indigenous vernacular accent.

Since he is an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity renders him politically ambivalent towards Western modernity, Mabanckou's narrative experimentation simultaneously uses and abuses the grammatical and literary norms of French (and English). For although the two languages are associated with linguistic imperialism, he appropriates and abrogates them in order to restore the marginalised accent of his native Congolese languages. As he makes clear in the interview with Stevenson, the fact that his novels are written in French and translated into other European languages like English does not mean he exalts Western civilisation, but rather that he problematises its cultural monopoly through its own languages (14). Crucially, in this regard, Mabanckou's postrealist experimentation with blank spaces and block paragraphs is informed by

the postmodernist impulse of interrogating a dominant culture, not by denying it, but by subverting it from within its own assumptions and conventions.

Mabanckou's concrete prose thus extends the African modernist tradition, which appropriated postrealist experimentation for decolonisation purposes. If, according to Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism is both an intensification and subversion of modernism in the West (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 49), then it must also be a continuation and discontinuation of modernism in the African postcolonial context. John Mepham similarly explains that postmodernism avoids total rejection and simple repetition of past traditions because it is an ironic reworking of such literary precursors (153). So, for example, block paragraphs in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* bear a strong intertextual similarity with those in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, as well as those in *Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner, two Western novels that are often associated with both modernism and postmodernism. Of course, the point of contrast is that, despite sharing the lack of indentation with Mabanckou's novels, block paragraphs in *Ulysses* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are usually conventionally punctuated.

To say that *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* derive their experimentation from modernism is obviously not to say that all forms of African concrete prose are postmodernist in nature as Kenzo seems to suggest. His description of African postmodernist experimentation attaches greater importance to its deconstructive devices than to its decolonisation function. As already mentioned, this privileging of art for art's sake over its political potential misses what Tiffin identifies as the key distinction between postcolonial and postmodernist fiction, namely that, although they both employ indistinguishable deconstructive writing techniques, the former does so in order to write back to the colonial empire in contrast to the latter's politics of disillusionment and despair (*Past the Last Post* x).

In accordance with this decolonisation imperative, African postmodernist writing is, by definition, ambivalent towards Western modernity and its literary traditions, both formally and ideologically. The implication here is that Mabanckou's postrealist experimentation with block paragraphs and blank spaces in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, while indicating ideological differences between postcolonial and Western postmodernist fiction, points to their similar deconstructive strategy of undermining Western modernity from within its liberal humanist and global capitalist assumptions and practices. Mabanckou's African postmodernist novels, in other words, are premised on the paradox of installing and subverting realism's colonial imposition of European languages.

Exactly this postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism is what the reader encounters in the narrative experimentation with blank spaces and block paragraphs by Mabanckou's surrogate authors. Their subversion of the formal strategies of realism in French (and English) calls to mind Steven Connor's contention that postmodernist fiction derives its interrogative impetus from the Western culture it conceives of as an accomplice, rather than as an antagonist (71). If this is the case in the West, then postmodernist fiction must also derive the same problematising force from the linguistic hegemony of French (and English) in the African postcolonial context. Consequently, the concrete prose that results from the experimental inscription of run-on commas, block paragraphs, and blank spaces in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* plays out the perpetual ontological opposition between written French (and English) words on the page and their projection of the Congolese accent in the fictional world.

In *Broken Glass*, this ontological opposition is evident when the Stubborn Snail bemoans the insertion of blank spaces in the final version of the narrator's notebook. What he finds particularly problematic with these blank spaces, as with run-on commas, is that they violate the

formal narrative conventions of the traditional novel. Not surprisingly, we read that the Stubborn Snail pleads with the surrogate author to consider revising the notebook, since its blank spaces are unconventional and signal the text's incompletion (158). This conservative plea, regardless of its analytical correctness, reveals total unawareness of the narrator's subversive attitude towards French as the official language of the Republic of Congo. As an avid reader of fiction and a former primary school teacher, Broken Glass is fully aware of French grammatical and literary rules, but he intentionally breaks them in order to critique the colonial subjugation of Congolese languages.

Like the Stubborn Snail, Stevenson overlooks the political significance of Broken Glass's narrative experimentation when she observes that Mabanckou's novel inscribes "blanks for brief silences" (12). While the inscription of blank spaces indeed ushers the reader into moments of brief silences from one block paragraph to another, Stevenson does not explain why the surrogate author does this, let alone the socio-political relevance and implications of this narrative experimentation. However, as I argue in this chapter, Mabanckou's narrative experimentation with concrete prose serves the political function of undermining French (and English) from within their realist conventions by interrupting the mimetic illusion of page layout and sequence.

As with postmodernist texts which, according to McHale, inscribe blank spaces in order to foreground their materiality and disrupt the reality of the projected fictional world (*Postmodernist Fiction* 181), Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* simultaneously confirms and unsettles the reader's certainty of both European and Congolese languages. While what we see on the page is a familiar fictional prose in French (and English) words, its block paragraphs and blank spaces defamiliarise our conventional sense of narrative layout and sequence. In conjunction with run-on commas, block paragraphs and blank spaces create a concrete prose that results in a recurring tension

between the written European words on the page and the projection of the fast-paced rhythm of Congolese languages in the fictional world.

Although *Memoirs of Porcupine* does not explicitly refer to its blank spaces and block paragraphs, the reader encounters a similar subversion of realist narrative sequence and layout because the novel is also written by Broken Glass through the porcupine's surrogate authorship. The resulting perpetual flicker between French (and English) words and the Congolese accent confirms McHale's argument that various spacing configurations in a postmodernist text induce an ontological oscillation between its real-world materiality and its projected fictional world (184). This narrative effect becomes tellingly apparent when the Stubborn Snail reads aloud the narrator's notebook in the closing pages of *Broken Glass*, whose concrete and rambling prose reminds the reader of the similar structure in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* (159; 101).

In both novels, then, the postmodernist device of foregrounding the technological reality of the printed book takes on a socio-political dimension. Both surrogate authors evince Mabanckou's politicisation of narrative layout and sequence through the subversive experimentation with block paragraphs and blank spaces. In other words, Mabanckou inflects postmodernism with a decolonisation impulse that aligns itself with the linguistic entanglement and reciprocity between African and European languages. That is, while he does not entirely replace or implode French (and English), he deliberately violates their grammatical and realist conventions in order to reinstate the marginalised Congolese accent, thereby subverting linguistic imperialism from within.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Mabanckou's narrative experimentation with run-on commas, block paragraphs, and blank spaces in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* presents a

postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism. The two novels show that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to modernity's imposition of French (and English) in the African postcolonial context. However, Mabanckou deploys postmodernism differently in the African postcolonial context in order to fulfil the emancipatory project of decolonisation. As an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity renders him an inheritor of both Congolese and European languages, Mabanckou's writing evinces a socio-political ambivalence towards French (and English) by using and abusing them through relexification and concrete prose. In these experimental processes, the two novels do not only recuperate the subordinated Congolese accent, but also reveal that, for all their universal hegemony, European languages are prone to subversive modification.

Of related socio-political significance is Mabanckou's postmodernist contribution to the language debate in African literature, which hinges on the question of whether to write the continent's fiction in European or native languages. To this language question, there has been, since the 1962 conference of African writers of English expression in Uganda, two contrasting answers. Others, mainly Achebe and Okara, embrace the use of European languages, but in their altered forms so that they carry the weight of African cultures. For revolutionaries like Ngugi and Wali, however, the use of European languages in the writing of African literature is inimical to indigenous languages in that it leads to their impoverishment and, ultimately, to their potential extinction. By incorporating both aspects of the debate in his narrative experimentation without necessarily being reducible to either of them, Mabanckou shows a postmodernist ambivalence towards both African and European languages that is increasingly gaining global traction in recent times. The continuous emergence of relexified forms of European languages across the world serves as a telling testimony to this contemporary trend.

In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, narrative experimentation with run-on commas, block paragraphs, and blank spaces also raises and answers the important theoretical question of the extent to which other African postcolonial writers, who also experiment with language and form may be deemed postmodernist or not. As this chapter has elaborated, experimentation in itself and for its own sake does not constitute African postmodernism, for, in my understanding and use of the term, it is an ambivalent, yet a constant entanglement of writing strategies associated with Western postmodernism and a decolonisation politics of African postcolonial writing.

Chapter Four: The Representation of the Authorial Self in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*

Perhaps the most remarkable similarity running through Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* (2013), *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* (2015), and *Black Moses* (2017) is that their form and content blur the ontological boundary between real life and its fictional representation. In the order of their English translation from French, the first two novels are presented as autobiographies that trace Mabanckou's childhood experiences in Pointe-Noire, the economic capital of the Republic of Congo, whereas the third novel is a *Bildungsroman*, which details the narrator's psychological and moral transition from childhood to adulthood in the same coastal city. In all the three novels, Mabanckou employs surrogate authors, who double as protagonists and narrators in the fictional world. This chapter intends to demonstrate that this surrogate authorship and its first-person narration represent Mabanckou's authorial self from a postmodernist perspective, that is, not only as the writer of his real life, but also as the reader of its fictional version.

As repeatedly noted, postmodernist fiction is self-reflexive in nature, and, in the present chapter, I will show how and why such a metafictional aesthetic informs, indeed characterises, Mabanckou's three novels. In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, the narrator is Michel, a ten-year-old Congolese boy, who, as the title announces, relates his childhood experiences while anticipating coming of age at twenty. The narrator in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is a Congolese diasporic writer, who returns to the putative city to attend a two-week symposium at the French Institute and to relive his childhood after a twenty-three-year absence. In *Black Moses*, the titular narrator recollects his childhood at Loango orphanage and his adulthood in Pointe-Noire, where he emulates his biblical namesake by murdering the city's mayor, François Makélé, in order to avenge the xenophobic persecution of prostitutes from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and

to liberate the masses from poor living conditions – a messianic crusade that ultimately leads to his interment in a mental asylum.

These three novels evince correspondences in form, theme, setting, and character in ways that suggest a rethinking of the traditional distinction between autobiography's factuality and the *Bildungsroman*'s fictionality. Significantly, in this regard, Apollo Amoko, in his account of African autobiographical writing and the *Bildungsroman*, argues that:

> Although there appears to be a radical opposition between the 'factual' autobiography and the 'fictive' *Bildungsroman*, there are considerable correspondences and convergences, at least in the African context, between the two in terms of context, content, and form […]. For all their normative insistence on literal truthfulness, autobiographies are carefully constructed esthetic objects […]. At the same time, even though the *Bildungsroman* – like any other work of art – normatively eschews literal truth claims, it nevertheless makes, under the guise of fiction, large truth claims about specific historical, political, and cultural contexts. (195)

Amoko's argument is that both genres are, in fact, factual and fictional at the same time. By implication, then, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* continue the self-writing tradition of their African pretexts, such as Camara Laye's *The African Child*, which Mabanckou cites as one of his influences in the 2010 interview with Binyavanga Wainaina (31).

However, as I argue in this chapter, the form of *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* diverges quite markedly from that of their pretexts because Mabanckou incorporates self-reflexive techniques that are associated with Western postmodernist writing. Rather than use realist strategies, which do not acknowledge their narrative constructedness, he draws attention to the writing process itself (which, as was discussed in the

third chapter of this study, is one of the effects achieved by his narrative experimentation). As Brian McHale argues in a related context, one form of postmodernist experimentation is the intrusion of the author in his or her own fiction ("Postmodernism and Experiment" 147-48). At issue here is the author's simultaneous existence in and out of his or her writing, both as a protagonist in and a reader of his or her life. It follows that the author violates the ontological boundary between real life and fiction by setting up the two realms in a recurring tension and flux.

Mabanckou's three novels, then, are an exercise in genre syncretism, which is one of the distinctive features of postmodernist fiction. In this regard, Linda Hutcheon maintains that postmodernism makes the borders between literary genres fluid by playing off their conventions against each other in such a way that they are in a constant flux, rather than in a simple and unproblematic fusion (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 9). Given postmodernism's theoretical indebtedness to poststructuralism, Hutcheon's argument undoubtedly accords with, even derives from, Jacques Derrida's critique of the structuralist conception of genres as closed systems. In "The Law of Genre," Derrida advocates the principle of genre contamination, impurity, and parasitical economy, which, of course, implies that every text, by virtue of being an artistic artefact, belongs to different genres at the same time, since it associates with, and so participates in, a chain of pretexts belonging to different genres as well (59, 65).

It is this transgression, and therefore continuous redefinition, of genre demarcations that connects postmodernism and autobiographical writing. According to Alfred Hornung, both genres use narrative strategies that bridge the gap between life and art ("Autobiography" 222-23). Leigh Gilmore similarly notes that autobiography, in its various transcultural and interdisciplinary forms, borrows postmodernist techniques and critique (3). This is exactly what Mabanckou does in the three novels in question. By appropriating such techniques and critique, they suggest the possibility

of an African postmodernism. In doing so, Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* demonstrate the aesthetic practice of localising the global, since autobiographical writing, as another form of the novel genre, is traditionally a Western tradition, which reached Africa through the agency of the colonial encounter.

Importantly, in this regard, Kgomotso Michael Masemola, in his article entitled "Autobiography in Africa," traces the emergence of the continent's autobiographical writing from the missionary influence on colonial education:

> Arising from the substratum of the missionary tradition of diaries and memoirs, the genre evolved to become a major mode of expressing the *Zeitgeist* of nationalism. […] missionary autobiographies were built on the opposition between a domain that was, on the one hand, considered primitive, and, on the other hand, conceived as civilized or enlightened. As a rule, African converts such as Mabundo tended to prefer what they considered "modern" culture; their autobiographies were often attempts to justify converting to "modern ways" and identifying with European values. (344-45)

Drawing on *An African David and Jonathan: The Autobiography of Padre Manfred Mabundo* (1926), Masemola shows that African autobiographical writing is a transcultural product of the aesthetic practice of localising the global which was engendered by colonial education through missionaries. A telling irony, though, is that both missionaries and their African converts like Mabundo conceived of autobiographical writing in strictly binarist terms. As already argued, however, the colonial encounter between Africa and Europe initiated the entanglement of African and European values, thereby undermining any essentialist notions of cultural purity.

Not surprisingly, then, Masemola later problematises the binarist conception of African autobiographical writing by drawing attention to the perpetual overlap between indigenous

customs and colonial ones. More precisely, he argues that "African autobiographical writing explores the tensions between the individual and the communal, the traditional and the modern, childhood naiveté and adult political maturity, the tendency to acquiesce versus the will to live, migration and return, and belonging and becoming" (346). The suggestion here is that African autobiographical writing concerns itself with the reciprocal nature of various effects of enforced modernity.

This chapter, then, examines the socio-political relevance and implications of deploying a postmodernist aesthetic in African autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*. My argument is that Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* perform a postmodernist critique of the disruptive effects of Western modernity on both his fictional and real life, as well as on the collective existence of his extended family and friends. In developing this argument, I shall show, as I have done in the preceding chapters, that Mabanckou's Afrodiasporic status and the aesthetic glocalisation that accompanies it render him politically ambivalent towards Western modernity and its African version. For this reason, he localises a postmodernist aesthetic of autobiographical writing in the African postcolonial context in order to critique the disruptive effects of enforced modernity.

The corollary of this political ambivalence, as I further contend in this chapter, is that Mabanckou, through his surrogate authors, uses self-reflexive strategies not simply as postmodernist exercises in blurring the ontological divide between real life and fiction, or to romanticise his past and present, but rather to problematise the impact of enforced modernity on his interpersonal relationships from which his glocalised identity proceeds. Indeed, apart from subjecting the reader to the perpetual negotiation of the ontological boundary between Mabanckou's real life and its fictional representation, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of*

Pointe-Noire, and *Black Moses* gesture towards how his authorial self, from childhood to adulthood, responds to the social, political, and economic upheavals resulting from the colonial encounter between French and Congolese cultures.

The Joys and Tribulations of Childhood: Education, Poverty, and Crime

Amoko informs us that African autobiography and the *Bildungsroman* evince a decolonising function that transcends art for art's sake. In particular, he makes a telling point that early examples of African autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*, through their stories of the passage from childhood to adulthood, provided authors with the ideological means to critique the disorienting effects of Western modernity and to offer alternative futures by exploring new ways of being in the colonial and postcolonial worlds (197). He illustrates this point by analysing how different stages of Western modernity, from the days of slavery to the present age of global capitalism, affect the identity formation of the narrators in J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Wole Soyinka's *Aké*, just to mention a few examples. Likewise, Masemola points out that "the quest for national independence established the context for the emergence of autobiography in Africa during the age of decolonisation of the 1950s and shaped the formal features and political content of this genre" (344).

While Amoko and Masemola are right in ascribing the political content of African autobiographical writing to the decolonisation movement, they emphasise its binarist politics, overlooking its localisation of Western values and aesthetics. Indeed, although the narrators in Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* respond differently to the disorienting effects of enforced modernity, they do so self-reflexively, and in a manner that underscores the ideological relevance of postmodernism to African decolonisation. This relevance, argues Zine Magubane in a related context, manifests itself in postmodernism's

contribution to Africa's engagement with modern socio-political realities (vii). The inference from this perspective is that Mabanckou's use of self-reflexivity in the three novels calls into question the assumptions and conventions of Western modernity from within.

In his postmodernist critique of the disruptive impact of Western modernity on his childhood, Mabanckou, as I have already demonstrated at some length, utilises the self-reflexive strategy of transworld identity or *retour de personnages*, which, according to McHale, is the recurrence of identical characters in different texts by the same author (*Postmodernist Fiction* 57; emphasis in original). As earlier noted, McHale's conception of transworld identity necessarily includes the perpetual intrusion of the author into the fictional world from the real world. *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* evince both aspects of transworld identity, especially the relationship between Mabanckou and his surrogate authors, as well as between characters sharing the same roles and names across both the real and fictional worlds of Pointe-Noire.

By using transworld identity, Mabanckou self-reflexively thematises the writing process in the three novels. What this implies is that the surrogate authors of the novels do not simply recall their childhood experiences, but do so by laying bare the writing process itself, which is to say, by making use of metafictional strategies. Even though metafiction is not explicit in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, the fact that *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is its sequel suggests that the Congolese diasporic writer is the main surrogate author and focaliser in both novels, since the ten-year-old Michel is, after all, too young to be a novelist. This is evident in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* when the narrator introduces his adoptive father as the man he endearingly calls "Papa Roger" in his "autobiographical book *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*" (14). He also claims this double authorship through his stepbrother, Yaya Gaston, who boastfully informs writers at the French Institute that

he is "the great Yaya Gaston in the novel *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*" written by his younger brother (75-6). The surrogate author indeed agrees that "Yaya Gaston plays a significant part" in his life, "which is why he is one of the principal characters in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*," where he portrays him as "an idol, a hero, a real proper big brother" (77).

The Congolese diasporic writer thus invents Michel as the surrogate narrator of *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* apparently in order to trace some of his childhood experiences which are not included in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Mabanckou acknowledges Michel's surrogate focalising role in his 2010 interview with Wainaina in explaining that *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* is an autobiographical account of his childhood in Pointe-Noire and, more importantly, that the novel is set in the 1970s when he was around 10 years old (31). Since he was born in 1966, this revelation is both factual and fictional. As with postmodernist novels which, according to McHale, foreground the vacillation of authorial presence and absence (*Postmodernist Fiction* 202), Mabanckou thus intrudes into and withdraws from his own novel, thereby blurring the ontological boundary between his real childhood and its fictional representation.

Unlike *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and *Black Moses* explicitly foreground Mabanckou's authorial appearance and disappearance. To borrow McHale's words, Mabanckou could be said to be playing hide-and-seek with the reader throughout the two novels by projecting the illusion of authorial presence only to withdraw it abruptly and filling the ensuing void with the surrogate authorship of the Congolese diasporic writer and Black Moses (202). So, for example, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* opens with the surrogate author's homage to his late mother, Pauline Kengué, as emerges when he "write[s] it now" that she died in 1995 (8). Curiously, she is Mabanckou's real mother, which means that, in a metaleptic collapsing of ontological levels, he doubles as a real and a surrogate author of the novel we are presently reading. The significance

of Mabanckou's metaleptic representation of both his real and fictional life also emerges when the surrogate author explains to his uncle Matété that he has come back to Congo to attend the conference at the French Institute, to see his extended family, and to write the very novel we happen to be reading (115). Moreover, in the last week of his stay, he openly claims that he is writing *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* in "a school exercise book" (25-6).

The mention of the school exercise book calls to mind the narrator's diary in *Black Bazaar* and Broken Glass's notebook in *Broken Glass*, both of which expose their own ontogenesis or coming into being. In both cases, the metaleptic short-circuiting of the ontological divide between the diary and the notebook and the novels in which they exist generates the metafictional illusion that the writing in the two novels is the writing of the novels themselves. In *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, this metafictional illusion appears when the surrogate author's cousin, Gilbert, explains to the guards at the Pentecostal church called New Jerusalem (previously Cinema Rex) that his relative has come to gather information because he is "writing a book about his childhood memories" (137). Indeed, on the eve of his return to Europe, the surrogate author describes his school exercise book in the following self-reflexive terms:

> That evening I put together my few belongings. Most precious were the pages of this notebook that I'd crumpled up and thrown in the bin in the kitchen. There were others, too, all around me, and I couldn't possibly reread them all. I could just imagine the look on the faces of the customs people at Pointe-Noire, when they opened my suitcase and found a whole load of paper. They'd think I was some kind of mental retard or a spy who was concealing vital information among all this mess. Would they suspect that there was a bit of their own lives in these crossings-out, these indecisions of writing? (198)

What is clear from this passage is that metalepsis in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* transgresses the ontological difference between the school exercise book, which is in the fictional world, and the autobiographical novel, which is a book in history. Not surprisingly, this metafictional illusion extends to the inscription of real pictures of young Mabanckou, his parents, his late sisters, and members of his extended family throughout the novel. Such violation of narrative sequence and layout is reminiscent of the narrative experimentation with run-on commas and concrete prose in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*.

While *Black Moses* lacks this sort of narrative experimentation, it foregrounds a similar metafictional illusion. Its epilogue suggests that it was written together with *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. In it, Mabanckou dedicates the novel to all the tramps of Côte Sauvage (the Congolese sea coastline), who, during his two-week stay in Pointe-Noire, tell him their life stories, which he fictionalises into *Black Moses*. Significantly, in doing so, he grants the wish of one of the vagrants nicknamed "Little Pepper" to be a fictional character by turning him into the novel's surrogate author with the same nickname. It turns out that Mabanckou infiltrates his own novel through the surrogate authorship of Little Pepper, but, typical of a postmodernist writer, withdraws his presence, except in metafictional moments.

One such metafictional moment occurs at the beginning of Little Pepper's autobiographical confession when he claims that, while "writ[ing] these lines" of *Black Moses*, he remembers Papa Moupelo, a priest from Democratic Republic of Congo, who conducted catechism classes at the orphanage and gave him the name of Black Moses (8). At the end of the confession, he also reveals that he is "allowed to write" all day long and that the resulting narrative is the *Bildungsroman* we happen to be reading (197). He further informs us that he gives the manuscript of *Black Moses* to his best friend so that he can edit out misspellings and anachronisms (198-99). In a metaleptic

transgression of the ontological demarcation between real and surrogate authorship, Mabanckou positions himself within Little Pepper's real-life transition from childhood to adulthood and its fictional representation.

What is therefore at work in Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* is, as I have pointed out earlier, the postmodernist notion of the author as the reader of his or her own life and fiction. As Hornung puts it, postmodernist fiction is characterised by the pose of the authorial self as the reader of his or her own fiction and, by implication, of his or her own life ("Reading One/Self" 175). By this, Hornung means that autobiographical writing is not merely based on the author's real life, but on the intertextuality of reading its fictionalised form in his or her own work ("Autobiography" 225). Bran Nicol argues that it is precisely at this point that a postmodernist author invites the reader to collaborate in the creation of the text (20). Exactly such an invitation is what Mabanckou extends to the reader when he explains to Wainaina that, in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, he fictionalises his childhood experiences between 10 and 11 years by turning his parents and extended family members into characters and infusing the narrative with magical and surreal elements (31). While the reader does not necessarily encounter Mabanckou's childhood experiences in *Black Moses*, the fact that he was also raised in Pointe-Noire means that he empathises with Little Pepper both as his co-author in real life and in the fictional world.

In the African postcolonial context, however, Mabanckou's postmodernist writing goes beyond a mere formalistic foregrounding of self-reflexivity. As I have argued throughout this thesis, he invests his postmodernist writing with a politics of African decolonisation which enables the critique of Western modernity from within. Moreover, self-reflexivity, as Marcel Cornis-Pope maintains, is more than a formal strategy because it is concerned with both experiential and

ideological aspects of narration (257-58). Self-reflexivity in Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* is therefore characterised by the glocalised impulse of simultaneously localising and subverting the assumptions and conventions of Western modernity.

Since the vestiges of colonialism still reinforce Western modernity, Mabanckou problematises the disruptive effects of French-based education on his childhood and that of his peers. As already argued, African postmodernism interrogates both enforced modernity and its local extensions, particularly in the form of Western-imposed institutions and policies. One example of this imperialistic legacy, as I note in the third chapter of this thesis, is the imposition of French language as the official medium of communication and education. To the extent that education provides early socialisation skills, it exerts formative influence on the moral and psychological development of children. However, in most African postcolonial societies, education, especially at its secondary and tertiary levels, is inaccessibly expensive to the masses, an economic discrepancy that leads to high dropout rates and, with them, crime and poverty.

In Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Michel exposes not only the economic pressure that accompanies Congolese elementary education, but also the human-rights abuses that inhere in its socialist policies. This is evident at the beginning of the novel when Michel introduces his maternal uncle, René, who works as an administrative and financial director at CFAO, the only company in Pointe-Noire that sells cars (1). What is noteworthy about Uncle René is that he is a self-proclaimed communist, whose Marxist ideologies mirror the imposition of a socialist curriculum across the country, as becomes clear in Michel's following confession:

> The thing that gets my Uncle René is the capitalists, not the communists, who must unite because apparently the final struggle won't be long now. At least, that's what they teach

> us at the école populaire in Moral studies. They tell us, for instance, that we are the future of the Congo, that it's up to us to make sure that capitalism doesn't win the final struggle. We are the National Pioneer Movement. To start with we children belong to the National Pioneer Movement and later we'll belong to the Congolese Workers' Party – the CPT – and maybe one day one of us will even become President of the Republic, who also runs the CPT. (2-3)

A telling irony in this confession is that the compulsory introduction of moral studies in the Congolese primary curriculum serves the ideological interests of the government, rather than the purported moral development of the pupils. Whatever the didactic value of moral studies, its punitive paternalism aims to produce docile citizens, whose mentality should reinforce the country's dictatorship, not question or undermine its legitimacy. This is further apparent when Michel reveals that they also learn about the president's "glorious life story," which is probably an extract from a "big fat book" he personally wrote and is even taught "at middle school, high school and university" (49, 51).

In Mabanckou's novel, this socialist indoctrination gains a disciplinary dimension when pupils at Trois-Martyrs primary school are coerced into reciting the president's speeches and tenets of the Congolese Workers' Party and punished for any failure or imprecision to do so. Michel informs the reader that every pupil must "recite the first four articles of the law of the National Pioneers Movement" in order to be allowed into class every morning (131). As emerges in his mock recitation, he knows by heart the four articles, which emphasise total obedience to the Congolese Workers' Party and hero-worship of the country's president (132). Moreover, teachers encourage other pupils to emulate the impeccable recitation of the president's speech by Adriano, the most intelligent in Michel's class (146-47). They even command Adriano to whip twenty times

those who fail to imitate him while the rest of the class counts (148). Mabanckou thus simultaneously acknowledges the significance of education in the cognitive development of Congolese children and exposes its dark side as an instrument of dictatorship.

The reader witnesses a similar postmodernist critique of Congolese education in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* when the surrogate author recalls his experiences at Trois Glorieuses secondary school. His description of the uniform as "a sky-blue shirt and dark blue shorts" with a red kerchief of the "pioneers of the Congolese Revolution" around the neck indicates that socialism is enforced at high school level (96). Moreover, during the raising of the national flag in the schoolyard, students are forced to sing the national anthem that is full of socialist slogans, which they are ordered to memorise (97-8). The government also hangs portraits of "the authors of the *Communist Party Manifesto*" in every classroom, at street intersections, and next to the official photo of the country's president (175).

As an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity makes him politically ambivalent towards Western and African modernity, Mabanckou interrogates his country's education policies from the perspective of his childhood experiences. Since postmodernism is ineluctably implicated in Western modernity, all it can do is to question from within, since there is no outside. In the African postcolonial context, then, Mabanckou does not only question the repressive policies of Congolese education from within, but also calls for their urgent abolition.

As in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, Mabanckou's *Black Moses* employs the postmodernist critique of Congolese education both from within the socialist ideologies and practices at Loango orphanage school, which is under the directorship of the regime's sycophant, Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako. In this *Bildungsroman*, Little Pepper's education coincides with the dawn of the Socialist Revolution of Congo and the establishment of its bureaucratic branches across Pointe-

Noire. We read that the director fires Papa Moupelo and turns his office into a "Meeting Hut for the National Socialist Revolution of Congo" (17). In fact, on the revolution's launching day, the orphans are forced to wear "red kerchiefs" like those in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* (17). In his speech, the director emphasises that the orphans are the "builders and protectors of the Scientific Socialist Revolution," and they must applaud him throughout, or risk a brutal beating from the watchful wardens (19). Like Michel, Black Moses reveals that this systematic indoctrination transforms into corporal punishment:

> Generally speaking, it was the children who hadn't recited the President's latest speech well enough who were made to sweep the yard. But Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako could decide to hand a broom to anyone who failed to lower their gaze before the staff or member of the party. He shut up the recalcitrant ones in a building used by the Revolution, now simply used as a cell in which people were coerced into an understanding of the obligations of the pioneers of the socialist Revolution, with a heavy metal door and a small hole through which they slid rotten food. These 'prisoners of the Revolution' – as distinct from 'pioneers of the Revolution', who were altogether more decent, better-formatted, obedient – were forced to listen to the quavering voice of the President of the Republic on constant loop on a cassette player, supplied by the government to institutions like ours, which now reported to the ministry of Families and Childhood. (40-41)

As with postmodernist writing which is complicit in that which it critiques and at once inscribes and subverts, *Black Moses* criticises the human-rights abuses that accompany the Congolese revolution from within. As emerges from his implacable recitation of the president's speech (like Adriano in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*) and the director's editorial in *Pioneers Awake!*, a state propaganda sheet that is posted on the hut of the National Movement of Pioneers every Monday

morning, Little Pepper is intimately attached to the country's education system, but undermines it from within (27, 42, 56).

What is therefore at work in Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of the disorienting effects of Congolese education on his childhood are self-reflexive strategies of rewriting and rereading. As noted in the first chapter, postmodernist fiction is characterised by the combination of rewriting and rereading in both the main text and its pretexts. For Cornis-Pope, such self-reflexive techniques undermine the common assumptions of a transparent reality and the possibility of unmediated communication, as well as the boundary between writing and experience, fact and fiction, public and private (263). In the context of Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*, the implication is that the surrogate authors rewrite and reread not only their childhood experiences, but also those of their peers within and across the three narratives, including those of Mabanckou's other novels.

It is in this sense of rewriting and rereading that I part company with Heide Ziegler's understanding of postmodernist autobiography and, in particular, her argument that the author is no longer required to write about his or her life, but about his or her role in the narration process (207). By privileging writing over the real life on which it is based and which it conveys, Ziegler reinstates the boundary between fiction and fact that postmodernism collapses. What I find useful, however, is her notion of authorial unreliability, which, as we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, derives from the Barthesian concept of the death of the author. In this poststructuralist view, the author is only a compiler of preexisting and recycled linguistic codes, and therefore not the originator of meaning in the text (see Barthes *The Rustle of Language* 53). From this perspective, Ziegler convincingly argues that since the author is the reader of his or her own text which is itself

subject to the linguistic rules of signification, he or she becomes an unreliable narrator because what is written demands constant interpretation and re-interpretation (207).

Nonetheless, a text does not write itself because its very own ontogenesis or coming into being inevitably depends on a constrained measure of authorial agency, albeit one that cannot serve as a guarantor of meaning. Rewriting and rereading, then, foreground both authorial and linguistic influences, which is why postmodernist texts, as McHale maintains, open themselves to the intrusion of the authorial persona, both as the vehicle of autobiographical *fact* within the projected fictional world and as the *maker* of that world (*Postmodernist Fiction* 202; emphasis in original). This is strikingly true of Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* in which the surrogate author "read[s] through the notes" he has taken so far and "continue[s] writing this book" we are reading now (88). He "tear[s] out pages" he has already written and "throw[s] them in the bin," only to "retrieve them the next morning and write them again" (126). Likewise, *Black Moses*'s rewriting and rereading strategies emerge when the surrogate author co-edits his autobiographical confession with his prison mate and best childhood friend, Bonaventure Kololo (198-99).

Although *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* does not explicitly lay bare its rewriting and rereading techniques, the novel deals with Mabanckou's rewriting and rereading of his mid-life crisis. As he explains to Wainaina in the 2010 interview, he wrote this novel in order to process his childhood nostalgia, which, according to him, usually occurs when one is around 40, a claim that gains credence if we consider that he was 44 when the novel was published (31). This is indeed the therapeutic function of fiction that Hornung describes as one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism, especially in relation to the author's case history ("Autobiography" 223). Hornung further argues that postmodernist fiction is based on this process of reading oneself through a

dialogic imagination ("Reading One/Self" 177). The point here is that, in relating his case history, Mabanckou rewrites and rereads his childhood experiences.

Taken together, then, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* evince the ontological flicker between the rewriting and the rereading acts of Mabanckou's surrogate authors. As co-authors, we join them in rewriting and rereading both individual and collective responses to crime and poverty as disruptive effects of Congolese education. As I argue in chapter two of this study, Mabanckou shares Simon Malpas's postmodernist conception of subjectivity as a product of its conditions of existence (79). Indeed, the dehumanising conditions of Congolese education force most of the country's youths to drop out and resort to crime in order to alleviate the poverty that proceeds from unemployment.

In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Michel reveals that most criminals in Pointe-Noire are, in fact, school dropouts, as becomes clear when he stages a mock marriage with Caroline, a sister of his best friend, Lounés. In their nuptial discussion of the future welfare of their imaginary children, Caroline proposes saving money in the bank, fearing that if they become delinquent vagrants, "the state will take them away and put them in a place for orphans, and they'll end up like the thugs at the Grand Marché" (16). These are also "the bad guys from the Grand Marché" that Uncle René scares from his posh mansion by putting a "BEWARE FEROCIOUS DOG 24/7" sign on the gate (221, 231). Caroline's implicit accusation of orphanages for producing these thugs evokes Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of the Congolese foster care system and adoptive families in *African Psycho*. While he acknowledges the humanitarian and didactic roles of these institutions, he problematises their hypocrisy and irresponsibility. Instead of rescuing orphans from deprivation and depravity, both systems often drive them into vagrancy and crime.

Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty provides similar evidence through the testimonies of Mama Martine, the first and other wife of Papa Roger, and Little Pepper, a madman that Michel befriends at the dumping ground in his search for a key which, according to the traditional healer that his parents consult, will reopen his mother's womb which he must have magically locked after his birth. In the novel, Mama Martine reprimands Michel and one of his half-brothers, Maximilien, for attending Papa Wemba's concert when they know that "the thugs from the Grand Marché" prowl around during such occasions (274). Likewise, Little Pepper informs him that "the gangsters from the Grand-Marché" share "their spoils and threaten each other with screwdrivers" by the banks of Tchinouka river at night (296).

Little Pepper, as already noted, and as the epilogue of *Black Moses* indicates, is this novel's surrogate author, who doubles as a protagonist and a narrator in the fictional world and Mabanckou's friend and co-author in the real world of Pointe-Noire. Of course, at work in both *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* and *Black Moses* is the postmodernist strategy of transworld identity. While Little Pepper exposes the criminal life of orphans in the former, in the latter he is a member of such a criminal gang after escaping from the orphanage to Pointe-Noire under the leadership of notorious twins, Songi-Songi and Tala-Tala. He confesses that they sleep "in the Grand Marché" with other teenage gangs they find there (102). To make ends meet, they spend the day "wandering around," stealing meat kebabs from "the old mamas" and "electrical gadgets from the Moroccan shops," or "fighting with rival gangs" (103). Individually, Little Pepper steals "scooters or car tyres," mugs "whites in the town centre," and sets "ambushes for lovers" in order to rob them (109). This world of crime and vagrancy certainly derives from the collective response to the dehumanising conditions at Loango orphanage.

Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* also rewrites *African Psycho* through the transworld identity of Angoualima and Grégoire, who become criminals after suffering similar childhood trauma. As already noted, Grégoire identifies with and performs Angoualima's serial killer identity because of their identical experience of being abandoned as unwanted babies by their biological mothers. This transfer of characters and their identities unfolds when Michel compares the French criminal named Jacques Mesrine to Angoualima and his self-professed disciple, Grégoire. After hearing the radio news of Mesrine's death, Papa Roger tells Michel that the French gangster was "stronger and more intelligent" than Angoualima, who "cut people's heads off, or stole from the Whites in the centre of town" (233). Moreover, unlike Mesrine, who gets killed by the police while escaping in his car, the late Angoualima was poor and so is Grégoire now (233). Since the young "gangsters in the Grand Marché" want to be rich and famous, they now nickname themselves after Mesrine, and not after Angoualima like before (234).

In Mabanckou's depiction of his childhood experiences, poverty emerges as another disruptive effect of enforced modernity that influences Congolese youths to migrate to Europe, especially school dropouts and the unemployed. As Dominic Thomas argues in *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transitionalism*, poverty in sub-Saharan Africa forces the youth to seek better living conditions in Europe, where they resort to crime in order to make ends meet (189). To the extent that these migration patterns are relatively recent, Thomas's argument bears comparison with Mabanckou's description of contemporary African literature, which is noted in his study entitled "Immigration, *Litterature-Monde*, and Universality: The Strange Fate of the African Writer," where he argues that the continent's writing now evinces a thematic shift from negritude to an introspective concern with the glocalised condition of Black people around the world (75).

Mabanckou develops precisely this glocalised dimension of identity in his autobiographical writing, especially *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*. In that the two novels deal with Congolese migration, they evince Mabanckou's rewriting and rereading of his first novel, *Blue White Red*, in which the narrator, Massala-Massala, migrates to France in order to emancipate his family from poverty. So, for instance, the Congolese diasporic writer in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* reveals that almost "every household" in Pointe-Noire has a family member who is a migrant in France and has "never returned," or will return after twenty years or so (92). We further read that most of these migrants are previously "young people wandering the streets of Pointe-Noire" (94).

As an Afrodiasporic subject himself, who is politically ambivalent towards enforced modernity, Mabanckou addresses both good and bad aspects of migration in his novel. Whereas migration generally improves the economic status of Congolese youths, it is bound up with racial discrimination and homesickness. A prominent instance unfolds when the surrogate author provides an account of his fellow Congolese diasporic writer at the French Institute, who, despite being from Pointe-Noire, despises the city's poor children. Ironically, however, although he "broadcasts the notion that the salvation of every Congolese" lies in migration, he hides from the locals that he lives in a tiny flat, struggles to legitimise his presence in France, and searches for casual work every morning (94).

The problems of family separation and nostalgia are also dealt with when the narrator recalls a farewell meeting with his mother. Shedding motherly tears of loss, Pauline Kengué complains that he is "hurting" her and that his departure fulfils the prophecy of her jealous barren cousin, namely that she will have a son who will "leave the country when he was twenty years

old" and return after her death (14). While this is fictional, it is also factual, for Mabanckou indeed received a scholarship to study in France at the age of 22.

The dynamics of Congolese migration also emerge in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* when Michel discloses that one of his half-brothers, Marius, is saving money to go to France "the day he turns eighteen" (169). We are told that although he is "only thirteen" years old, he already knows how to make his way to Europe as a stowaway through Angola (169). Unsurprisingly, he learns about this illegal route from Jerry the Parisian, his best friend's brother, who comes back to Pointe-Noire every dry season and lies to the youths that "in France you can get everything without working" (169). Tellingly, the relationship between Marius and Jerry the Parisian increasingly resembles that between Massala-Massala and Charles Moki in *Blue White Red*. In both novels, the families of Massala-Massala and Marius help them raise transport money, irrespective of the pain of separation, as is evident in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* and *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* when Papa Roger secures Marius temporary work during school holidays at his workplace, the Victory Palace Hotel (170; 34).

Experiences of Dictatorship, Corruption, Capitalism, and Racism

As previously argued, the colonial contact between Africa and Europe continues to exert a disruptive influence on the former's social, political, and economic organisation through neo-colonialism. Since this encounter involves the transcultural entanglement between the two continents, African leaders, as what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin describe as the *comprador* class, or middlemen between local and global capitalism (62; emphasis in original), cannot avoid complicity and identification with the Western values and practices they set out to decolonise. A common consequence of this capitalist complicity is the perpetuation of African post-independence problems, namely dictatorship, corruption, and poverty. This section of my

chapter examines how Mabanckou localises self-reflexive techniques associated with Western postmodernist autobiography as a critique of the disorienting effects of these postcolonial problems on the moral development of his surrogate authors in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*.

The inference, of course, is that Western imperialism, regardless of its technological contributions, has had a disruptive effect across Africa in that the imposition of Eurocentric values and practices means the introduction of new problems and the exacerbation of old internal ones. It is for this reason that the nationalist fight for independence held the promise of a better social, political, and economic order for African countries. However, as already argued, the betrayal of this promise by the first generation of African leaders has since engendered the collective sentiment of post-independence disillusionment. As Frantz Fanon rightly contends in *The Wretched of the Earth*, particularly in the chapter entitled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," early African leaders lacked economic power, which is why they were easily convinced to profitably replace the former colonial bourgeoisie (149). In other words, the relationship between African leaders and their colonial mentors lies in the capitalist exploitation of the continent's resources.

In this context, African leaders soon became dictators, who, according to Fanon, constantly demanded the nationalisation of the economy, not to serve national needs, but to take over the reins of capitalism from their former colonial masters (152). Kwame Anthony Appiah similarly points out that the leadership of the national bourgeoisie after colonialism "turned out to be a kleptocracy" (150). Moreover, this reign of dictatorship, corruption, and capitalism is accompanied by the perennial problem of racism. As I note in chapter one of this thesis, colonialism was premised on the racialised ideology that reinforced and justified the physical and psychological

subjugation of Africans. In the present age of neo-colonialism and global capitalism, dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism coexist in both overt and subtle forms.

These are probably the most pressing effects of enforced modernity that African postmodernist writing interrogates, both as an extension of and a departure from social realism. This aesthetic transition from realism to postmodernism, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, manifests itself more distinctly in form than in content. If Western postmodernist writing is postrealist in its self-reflexive techniques, then African postmodernist writing must also employ self-reflexivity as the dominant form, which is what I have demonstrated in juxtaposing Mabanckou's three novels with those of his predecessors. Since Mabanckou is an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity renders him politically ambivalent towards both Western modernity and its Congolese extension, it is hardly surprising that *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* enact the postmodernist critique of dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism both from within their Eurocentric and indigenous assumptions.

In this section I will therefore focus on individual and collective experiences of and responses to these social forces in the self-reflexive narratives of the three novels. I shall particularly trace the various ways in which these effects of enforced modernity disrupt the identity formation and interpersonal relations of Mabanckou's surrogate authors and the characters with whom they have close family or friendship ties. By simultaneously installing and subverting dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* draw our attention to the concrete agenda of postcolonial writing and criticism, which enables socio-political action, and which Western postmodernist writing lacks.

In all the three novels, Mabanckou's postmodernist critique of Western modernity exposes the emanation of dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism from the mindset and practices

of the Congolese ruling elite and their Western associates, and how these social ills then filter down to property-owning middle classes and ordinary citizens. As J.M.G. Le Clézio argues in the afterword of *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Mabanckou, through the observant eyes of Michel, exposes the follies and contradictions of rampant capitalism under the guise of the Marxist struggle and the greed of the moralising rich in every aspect of postcolonial Congolese society (312). This revelation, to borrow Tejumola Olaniyan's contention, exemplifies the salutary relevance of postmodernism in the African postcolonial context, that is, its problematisation of the notions of nationalism and anti-imperialism by demonstrating that they are no less politically and epistemologically repressive than the Western grand narratives they purportedly oppose (44).

In Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, this postmodernist critique focuses on the impunity with which the country's ruling elite abuse their power and the economy, as emerges when Caroline suggests to Michel that they "must buy a nice red five-seater car" and become "richer than the President of the Republic" (16). What is ironically clear in Caroline's suggestion is that the country's policy of socialist egalitarianism is empty rhetoric because the ruling elite, as a matter of political principle, enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. It is not surprising when Michel informs us that nobody can win "the Congolese National Lottery," if he or she is not "part of the President's family" (68). Such blatant nepotism represents one of the pitfalls of national consciousness that Fanon has warned against, that is, the privileging of tribalism over statehood, a contradiction that undermines national unity and progress (*Wretched of the Earth* 148-49). African postmodernism, Olaniyan argues, interrogates such abuse of power committed by African leaders in the last thirty years in the name of nationalism (44).

As in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Mabanckou also problematises the divisive effects of dictatorship and tribalism in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* by showing how they perpetuate political

and economic disparities, as becomes apparent when the surrogate author delineates the implications of Pointe-Noire's ethnic diversity:

> In this way the economic capital was in line with the rest of the country where ethnicity was more important than nationhood. How could it have been otherwise when even at the pinnacle of the state, power was distributed according to this pattern? The southerners had felt frustrated for decades by the northerners' stranglehold on political power. Of course, from time to time the latter shuffled the pack and assigned the portfolio for hydrocarbons to a minister from the south. The population didn't fall for it: the minister was merely a stooge, whose only legitimacy came from the fact that he was from the southern region where petrol was to be found. (144)

In this politics of regionalism, the West supports both sides of feuding factions, as becomes evident when a war hero, who cons the narrator into buying lunch, claims that the Congolese civil "war was all about getting control of the oil" in order "to sell it in secret and buy villas in Europe," since it is considered to be the private property of "the President of the Republic and his family" (156). The conman further reveals that the incumbent dictator "works with the French" because they supported him in overthrowing his "democratically elected" predecessor, who was betrayed by his American allies (156). Both France and America thus deliberately destabilise Congolese leadership for their own capitalist benefit.

Apart from masterminding coups d'état and supporting dictatorships, the West divides and rules the Republic of Congo through propaganda. In Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, Papa Roger discovers that the French mass media have not reported a Congolese coup d'état in which "President Marien Ngouabi was murdered" the previous week, a news blackout that leads him to suspect French involvement in the coup. What further fuels his suspicion is the deceased

president's policy of not working with the country's former colonisers (32). In fact, this happens to be the democratically elected president who was betrayed by his American allies.

What is typically postmodernist here is the ambivalence with which Mabanckou responds to the diplomatic relationship between Congolese leaders and their Western allies. While he acknowledges the role of diplomacy in the attainment of independence goals, he exposes how its abuse promotes dictatorship, corruption, and capitalism, which ultimately derail the country's socio-economic progress. *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, in other words, confirms the description of African postcolonial leaders as middlemen between national resources and global capitalism. In revealing the contradictions of Congolese leadership, Mabanckou exemplifies postmodernism's paradoxical complicity with systems of power which it seeks to undermine from within.

Quite ironically, the president himself reveals the contradictions of his socialist ideology in *Black Moses* when Little Pepper lampoons his speech, which pays tribute to the hardworking spirit of Congolese workers. In it, the president acknowledges the fact that the national workforce is not only "part of the poor peasant class," but also "the most important" in Congolese society (42). However, he confesses that the widespread poverty that exists in the country indicates a discrepancy between his socialist "theory and practice" (42). In this gesture of self-mockery, the president effectively suggests that Congolese socialism is merely a ploy to deflect attention from dictatorship and corruption.

As the novel progresses, this abuse of power turns into undisguised nepotism and cronyism, as is apparent when Black Moses traces the career history of the orphanage's director. We read that he used his "Bembé descent" to secure a job in "the office of the Minister for Public Affairs," which was headed by a fellow Bembé (82). However, when he competed in the "municipal elections in Mouyondzi, the symbolic hometown of his ethnic group," he lost to "a candidate

parachuted in by the government," who was a former schoolmate of the "President of the Republic" (83). As a token of consolation, he "was appointed prefect of Mabombo, a town in Bouenza, his native region" (83). When he "ran for deputy" mayor of the town three years later, he was also "beaten by a candidate supported by the government, none other than the daughter of the President of the Republic's medicine man" (83). Worse still, the name of this candidate "only appeared on the electoral lists twenty-four hours before the vote" (83). In short, both elections were routinely rigged.

As noted at the beginning of this section, this culture of corrupt capitalism characterises the entire ruling elite, whose life of luxury thrives on the poverty it creates. We witness this in *Black Moses* when the narrator eavesdrops on the clients of Mama Fiat, a prostitute from Democratic Republic of Congo, who takes him in after helping her carry shopping bags. Most of these clients, Little Pepper tells us, are pot-bellied "bourgeois from Batignolles," a posh neighbourhood where there is "much electricity and drinking water" (134). He even overhears them boasting that they travel around the world at will, own several houses "in all the big towns" of the country, have the money "to buy a yacht" for Mama Fiat, and that their house in Pointe-Noire is "the finest in all Batignolles," with neighbours who are "Europeans, or close family members of the President of the Republic" (134). Implicit in these claims is the systematic separation of the country's rich and poor, which effectively contradicts the socialist rhetoric of nationalism and decolonisation.

In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Mabanckou associates this show of corrupt capitalism with finance ministers who are appointed to facilitate the embezzlement of state funds. In the novel, Papa Roger informs Michel that a finance minister "looks after all the money in a country," and therefore the state monitors him or her carefully (203). Michel's father, however, also argues that

the Congolese finance minister "steals the country's money or helps the President and the members of his government to hide it in Swiss bank accounts" (209). Papa Roger attributes the lack of legal action against this brazen corruption to the fact that the ruling elite is involved "from the top all the way down" (209). He notices a similar corrupt tendency in the army's willingness to stage a coup d'état for any leader who promises "new uniforms, ranks, crates of foreign beer and a fat salary" (48).

Mabanckou's three novels also offer a postmodernist critique of enforced modernity by exposing the corrupt and capitalist practices of the country's bureaucrats and Western-owned company personnel. In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Uncle René represents the prevailing socialist ideology and its logic of greed and hypocrisy. As already noted, Michel informs the reader that his uncle is a communist, who, according to the prevailing socialist logic, advocates a simple life without the ownership of property like "television, telephone, or electricity, hot water or air conditioning," yet changes "cars every six months" (2). Young as he is, Michel sees through his uncle's hypocrisy and now realises that one "can be communist and rich" at the same time (2).

Mabanckou's text later exposes the contradictions of Congolese socialism when Michel goes to celebrate Christmas at his uncle's house. Contrary to the simple life of a communist, we learn that "Uncle René's house is the prettiest" in the neighbourhood and that he fears "the local proletariats, who live in the clapboard houses, will break into his property at any moment and steal all his wealth" (220). He therefore secures his plot with a fence that has "barbed wire on top" against the poor people he supposedly defends (220). He also contradicts his socialist principles when he equates Michel's act of looking at the plates of his cousins, Kevin and Sebastien, with the greed of "a capitalist's child," who, like his parents, aims at "accumulating wealth at the expense of the Wretched of the Earth" (225). The irony here is that Kevin and Sebastien are, in Michel's

words, “the biggest eaters on the earth” (225), and that the intertextual reference to Fanon’s book pokes fun at the poverty of the masses, rather than offering a socialist critique of the corruption that causes such wretchedness.

As with postcolonial texts which, according to Hutcheon, share postmodernism’s use of irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity to subvert a dominant culture from within (“Downspout of Empire” 183), Mabanckou’s *Tomorrow I’ll Be Twenty* also exposes and undermines the contradictions of Uncle René’s capitalist tendencies in the Congolese context. A case in point is when he lies to “his white bosses” that Michel is his son in order to receive “lots of money at the end of each year,” because the “more children” an employee has “the more toys and money” he or she gets as Christmas gifts (28). For this reason, some employees “have children on purpose,” whereas the childless ones “fetch their nephews from the villages” and then connive with hospital workers to “alter their birth certificates” (28). What emerges at this point in the novel is the national network of corruption that runs from the ruling elite all the way down to ordinary Congolese citizens.

Mabanckou’s *Tomorrow I’ll Be Twenty* also critiques Uncle René’s self-contradictions when he quarrels with Michel’s mother over the inheritance of the land left by their late mother, Henrietta Ntsoko. We gather that he grabs all the land because he is the oldest and that his sister must wait for his death to inherit it together with his property (106). As a self-proclaimed communist, one would expect Uncle René to denounce this unfair custom of inheritance and practise communal ownership. However, his capitalist greed contradicts his communist rhetoric, as becomes clear when Pauline threatens to inform his “white bosses” that Michel is not his son, a revelation that could result in his dismissal or demotion at the CFAO (28). What is tellingly ironic here is that although Pauline accuses her brother of greed, she is complicit in this corrupt scheme,

for she receives “a 1000 CFA franc note” and the toys that Uncle René brings for Michel on every Christmas eve (28).

Nevertheless, Pauline exposes Uncle René’s economic exploitation of his own extended family when he grabs the property of his late brother, Albert Moukila, who worked as a civil servant for the National Electricity Company in Pointe-Noire. In particular, she accuses him of taking Albert’s house when the children of the deceased should have been the rightful inheritors (106). In defending himself, Uncle René argues that Pauline’s accusation proceeds from “a typical capitalist point of view,” which is at variance with Congolese tradition and hence shows that the country is still “under the sway of imperialism” (106). Ironically, however, his argument that he paid for Albert’s medication “when he was in hospital,” bought his coffin, and “fed the people who came to his wake” is what best exemplifies the instrumental logic of global capitalism and Western imperialism (106).

In *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, Mabanckou again employs the postmodernist device of transworld identity in order to expose the corrupt practices of Uncle Albert, who is a victim of his brother’s capitalist greed in *Tomorrow I’ll Be Twenty*. In a metaleptic transgression of ontological levels, Mabanckou, through the surrogate authorship of the Congolese diasporic writer, rewrites and rereads the corrupt memory of his uncle in the two novels. In the former, Uncle Albert steals electricity for his entire extended family by making illegal connections “from one household through to the next” (48). Moreover, we are told that he created this form of communal life by bribing the city authorities to change the name of their family street to “rue de Louboulu” in honour of their ethnic origin from Bouenza district (47). He even invites these “government employees” to the street “renaming” party, where they all “shamelessly” celebrate the success of their corrupt deal (48). The Congolese diasporic writer thus criticises his uncle by revealing that, although he is

committed to improving the welfare of his extended family as a patriarch, he morally corrupts the people who look up to him.

Little Pepper similarly criticises the director's corrupt practices in *Black Moses*. Like Uncle René in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako is an advocate of the country's socialist ideologies, a political orientation that renders him an inheritor of corruption and nepotism from the ruling elite. In the novel, he employs Mpassi, Moutété, and Mvoumbi from his "mother's side" and Mfoumbou, Bissoulou, and Dongo-Dongo from "his father's side" as wardens, despite having "zero experience" (6). He similarly hires "Makilia Mabé and her five colleagues" as governesses responsible for the welfare of female orphans from his Bembé tribe (21). The narrator also reveals that the director has been using his political influence in order to enrol "his nephews from the father's side onto an ideological training course in Pointe-Noire so they could later become section leaders of the National Movement of Pioneers" for the Loango orphanage (25). The irony, however, is that although Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako favours his Bembé tribe from the south, the government is run by northerners, especially the Mbochis, a tribe which represents "a scant 3.5 per cent of the national population," meaning that "the leaders of the USYC" are predominantly northerners (26). In fact, the government sifts "through the applications carefully" to ensure the high employment rate of northerners (26). Ironically, then, the director and his nephews are fighting a losing nepotism battle.

Of even more ironic significance at this point in the *Bildungsroman* is the fact that the auditors of northern region origin subject the director to a tribalistic witch-hunt that exposes his corrupt practices. We gather that he fails to account for "the purchase of a clock," the increase of his salary "over fifty per cent each year" when his juniors have not had "a raise in seventeen years," and "abrupt dismissals without compensation" (84). In a vain attempt to secure immunity, he

reminds the inspectors of his political status as a "supporter and member of the Congolese Workers' Party" (85). What is ironically clear, though, is that the inspectors want to replace Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako with a fellow northerner, not so much because of his corruption crimes, but because he is a southerner. While he indeed deserves to be fired, his successor from the north will most likely continue the national culture of corruption and nepotism.

As I pointed out earlier in this section, the culture of corruption extends to the base of the civil service hierarchy. In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, for instance, Michel reveals that Yaya Gaston "works at the Customs," where clients bribe him with French clothes, "if they want to collect a big parcel" without paying tax (167). His half-brother's corrupt practices are comparable to those of one of the clients of Mama Fiat in *Black Moses*, Rigobert Moutou, who is the head of personnel at the Maritime Company in Pointe-Noire. We read that Mama Fiat persuades him to personally employ Black Moses as a dockhand and put him on a government salary, instead of tipping him "a thousand CFA francs every time" he visits her (145).

Mabanckou's *Black Moses* also exposes the corruption of the country's judiciary. Instead of upholding its mandate of ensuring justice against crime, the judiciary is also implicated in the perpetration of corruption. This becomes apparent when Bonaventure's father, Zacharie Kololo, who works for the National Water and Electric Company, illegally tampers with "electricity and water meters" like Albert Moukila in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* (44). We read that Kololo makes illegal connections for the "entire population" of Pointe-Noire in return for money, which he probably shares with his bosses, who are hidden accomplices in this corrupt business (44). Unlike Kololo's other customers, Bonaventure's mother pays him in kind for his services and, in the process, falls pregnant. In an ironic twist, he denies responsibility for the pregnancy "by using his connections" to accuse her of illegal connections, and, as a result, the company orders her to settle

the unpaid bills "within sixty days" (46-7). When she fails to comply, the company sues her and, on the day of the trial, the courtroom is full to see how the judge will handle the case, since it is common knowledge that Kololo and "other employees of the WEC" fix the city's meters (47). Nevertheless, the company wins the case, thereby exposing the deliberate miscarriage of justice in the network of corruption throughout the country's civil service.

Black Moses also provides a critique of capitalist injustices such as poor working conditions, exploitation, and cruelty. These evils are evident when the narrator recalls his work experiences as a dockhand at Pointe-Noire's Maritime Company. He remembers, for example, the foremen stripping naked any dockhand caught stealing "before lashing them with barbed wire and imposing a settlement" that would make the culprit a debtor to the company for the rest of his life (147). Ironically, the low salaries that the dockhands receive force them to steal and although the company sets up "a summary tribunal," there is "no investigation" before punishment or dismissal (147). Worse still, they are also stripped naked during routine "interminable searches" before knocking off daily (148).

The Congolese diasporic writer in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* problematises similar ill-treatment of workers at the Victory Palace Hotel. He reveals that, except Papa Roger, the rest of the staff live "in fear of the wrath of the French boss" who verbally abuses them (34). This ill-treatment, according to the narrator, continues even when she goes to France on holiday and leaves Papa Roger "in charge of the hotel" (34). Instead of treating his colleagues better, he steps "into the boss's shoes" and run the hotel with "an iron fist" by "calling some people ignorant, others bastards, and writing their names down in his notebook" in order to report them to the owner when she returns (34). By informing on his colleagues, Papa Roger divides and rules the Congolese workforce on behalf of the French owner. More ironically, Madame Ginette brings her father from

France to act as the hotel's inspector, and his new disciplinary rules prove unbearably ruthless even for Papa Roger, as emerges when he complains that his role has "been diminished" and that the "intruder" treats them "like children" (34-5).

As I have pointed out, such capitalist injustices are rooted in the racial prejudice that accompanied colonialism and persists in the current age of neo-colonialism. Tellingly, in this regard, Achille Mbembe maintains that:

> the African human experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a *negative interpretation*. Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of "human nature." Or, when it is, its things and attributes are generally of lesser values, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for humankind. (1; emphasis in original)

This passage exposes the othering attitude of Western discourses towards Africa and, by extension, its postcolonial subjects. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's coinage of the word, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define othering as "the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group," and that colonial discourse exploits these ways to produce its subjects (188). However, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin contend that "othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects" (188). By implication, then, othering, despite being a form of racism, nevertheless foregrounds the glocalised nature of African and Western identities. Indeed, if, as Olaniyan argues, postmodernism is a critique of racial prejudice in the postcolonial context (44),

then it must also be a critique of the othering assumptions of both Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses.

In his postmodernist critique of Western modernity in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*, Mabanckou shows how racism disrupts the process of identity formation, both at individual and collective levels. As I noted in my discussion of fragmented subjectivity in chapter two of this study, postmodernist writing evinces precisely such a performance of identity in which characters constantly experience the contradictions of their own selfhood and environment.

In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, the reader first encounters evidence of racism in the experiences of Monsieur Mutombo, Caroline's father and Papa Roger's best friend, who starts his entrepreneurship in Algeria as a cobbler before becoming a tailor. We are told that he habitually tells his customers that black people in Algeria and other Arabic countries "suffer" under forms of racism "almost as much as Blacks in South Africa" during apartheid, although people tend to ignore this injustice (42). What he finds particularly ironic is not only the fact that "pale skinned Arabs" do not marry dark skinned Arabs, but also that Arabs enslaved Blacks "like the Whites," and that this inhumane treatment still exists across the Arabic world up to this day (43). For Monsieur Mutombo, then, slavery was a multi-racial phenomenon, not just "between Whites and Blacks" (43).

His ambivalence towards racism and slavery closely resembles that of Monsieur Doukou Daka in *Black Moses*, Little Pepper's history teacher at the orphanage. We read that Monsieur Daka criticises both whites and blacks for their involvement in slavery and, in particular, "the rich business people in Loango," who used to send "their sons to a region of France called Brittany to study the secrets of the trade" (34-5). He contends further that even blacks enslaved each other

long before the coming of whites, so it is inaccurate to attribute slavery solely to external influences (35). Importantly, Monsieur Daka and Mutombo's political ambivalence towards racism and slavery accords with Mabanckou's simultaneous critique of Europeans and Africans, which emerges clearly in the aforementioned interview with Stevenson.

What is at stake here is racism's complex and insidious nature, an unawareness of which leads to its internalisation. Mabanckou's three novels, in other words, depict Congolese people as victims of internalised racism, that is, the subliminal acceptance of negative stereotypes about themselves and their culture due to years of colonial subjugation and indoctrination. This is the identity crisis that Fanon locates in the neurotic complexes of both black and white races in *Black Skin, White Masks*. As already noted, Fanon criticises the racial prejudice of both blacks and whites, since it undermines multicultural tolerance (3). In my discussion of self-reflexivity in chapter one of this thesis, I argue that racial prejudice is premised on skin colour difference, which is after all a linguistic construction, rather than natural and given. Exactly the same point is at issue in the three novels presently under discussion.

In *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, internalised racism unfolds in the subconscious assumptions of white superiority and black inferiority, as becomes apparent when Papa Roger names his daughter, Ginette, after his French employer. We are told that he does this "to please his boss" for employing him as a receptionist at the Victory Palace Hotel (170). In reciprocating this gesture, Madame Ginette increases "Papa Roger's salary by 130 CFAs a month" and gives her namesake "a bigger present than she gives the other children of the hotel workers" on Christmas eve (170). However, we detect racial prejudice in these gestures when Papa Roger calls another daughter "Marie-France, after Madame Ginette's older sister" and when the French boss rejects it as "ridiculous" (171). By taking advantage of his boss through French names, he nevertheless exposes

his inferiority complex towards whites, since he effectively implies that European names are grander than African ones. Similarly, although Madame Ginette later refuses to be taken advantage of, her preferential treatment of Papa Roger is influenced by the superiority complex towards Congolese natives. Mabanckou further exposes these racial prejudices through the attitude of Papa Roger's second daughter, who prefers her Congolese name of "Mbombie" to Marie-France, arguing that French people do not call their children by African names like "Marie-Congo or Marie-Zaire" (171).

Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* also calls into question the racial assumptions that inform the aesthetic sensibilities of Congolese people by juxtaposing the minority that resists inferiority complex with the majority that accepts it. Michel tells us, for instance, that Gaston calls his girlfriend, Geneviéve, "Black Beauty" because of her dark complexion and for not "straighten[ing] her hair with white people's products like the other local girls" (175). The production of hair-straightening chemicals by Western companies projects an illusory invitation to whiteness, which is, in fact, the psychological manipulation that underlies their capitalist marketing strategy. The irony, of course, is that the more Congolese girls straighten their hair the more they prove that they are not white, but simply wish to be so.

In *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, Mabanckou's critique of the illusion of whiteness extends to skin-bleaching. In the novel, Geneviéve's rejection of whiteness contrasts sharply with its pursuit by Gaston's sister, Georgette, who, according to the narrator, "whitens her skin and dyes her hair," despite being "over fifty" now (74). Her yearning for whiteness, we read, can be traced to her teenage years when she dated Parisians, who whitened their skin with "products made from hydroquinone" (78). In *Black Moses*, such a desire for whiteness is evident when Sabine Niangui, one of the female cleaners at the orphanage, explains to Little Pepper that her mother wanted "a

child with lighter skin" after she was impregnated by a Cuban soldier because "anything white was superior, everything black was doomed" (65). We notice a similar manifestation of internalised racism in Mama Fiat's prostitutes, who, in their line of duty, wear "blonde wigs" that make their clients feel like they are "kissing the queens of the Crazy Horse or the Moulin Rouge in Paris" (140).

Mabanckou further exposes similar delusions of whiteness in the education and work experiences of Congolese people. In *Black Moses*, this is clear when the director of the orphanage presents Monsieur Montoir as the new history teacher following the politically motivated dismissal of Monsieur Daka. He claims that Monsieur Montoir is more knowledgeable than his predecessor and will therefore make the orphans "more intelligent than the little white children of France" (38). What is ironic, however, is that Monsieur Montoir teaches "mostly French history" (37), thereby deliberately misinforming the orphans about their Congolese roots and, in the process, making them less intelligent than their French counterparts, who certainly know their history.

The director's belief in white supremacy increasingly resembles that of Kolo Loupangou, the narrator's old neighbour, who takes him to Doctor Lucien Kilahou when he suffers from psychiatric amnesia in the closing pages of the *Bildungsroman*. Loupangou informs Black Moses that Lucien Kilahou "studied with the whites" in France, and when he does not cooperate in one of the diagnosis sessions, the doctor reminds him that he "studied in France," as written on his door plaque, thereby suggesting that he would not have been a good doctor had he not studied in Europe (164, 170). A similar case of internalised racism emerges in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* when workers at the Victory Palace Hotel prefer Madam Ginette's harshness to that of Papa Roger because they believe that "being shouted at by a Negro [i]s worse than being shouted at by a white (34).

Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* also interrogates the racial claims of Western discourses on Africa. As I point out in the first chapter of this thesis, racism is enforced through the binarist logic that presents Africa as inferior to the West. In the novel, this racialised image of Africa is apparent when workers at the hotel decide to punish Madame Ginette's father for his punitive inspections by spreading the itchy spikes of a local plant called "kundia" on his chair. Quite erroneously, however, Madame Ginette hastily dismisses her father's itching bout as "a tropical infection" (36), stereotypically implying that it is an African disease that is caused by the continent's adverse weather conditions. The surrogate author similarly ascribes the stereotypical description of Pointe-Noire's children as living in a "paradise of poverty" by his Congolese friend at the French Institute to the uncritical acceptance of the racialised image of the "black continent projected by the media" in Europe (94). As with postmodernist texts whose discourses, according to Hornung, offer the emancipatory critique of cultural stereotypes ("Autobiography" 230), *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* subverts racial prejudices in order to promote multicultural tolerance and coexistence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Mabanckou's *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* enact a postmodernist critique of the disruptive effects of Western modernity, particularly education, poverty, crime, dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism. As I have demonstrated in my close reading of the three novels, these social, political, and economic exigencies exert a destabilising effect on the identity formation of the characters because they are forced to adopt conflicting personalities in order to maintain their interpersonal relationships. In the process, the characters constantly experience the contradictions of their own environment and existence, both individually and collectively.

I have also argued that Mabanckou's three novels differ from that of his African predecessors precisely because he uses self-reflexive strategies that are associated with Western postmodernist writing. However, he invests his self-reflexivity with a political dimension that transcends the blurring of the ontological boundary between real life and its fictional representation. As an Afrodiasporic writer, whose glocalised identity renders him politically ambivalent towards Western modernity and its African version, Mabanckou does not only identify with Congolese and French cultures, but also criticises their problematic aspects from within. It is this postmodernist ambivalence that confers a unique critical flexibility on his writing, which, by contrast, is lacking in African postcolonial works that are politically partisan. Indeed, his critique in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty, The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* does not spare his parents, his extended family, his fellow Afrodiasporic subjects, his French and American asylum providers, and even himself. The three novels, in other words, offer an African postmodernist representation of Mabanckou's authorial self.

Conclusion: Mabanckou's Contribution to African Literature

In this study, I have explored the use of a postmodernist aesthetic in Mabanckou's oeuvre, namely *Blue White Red*, *African Psycho*, *Broken Glass*, *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, *Black Bazaar*, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*. My central argument has been that if postmodernism is a critique of modernity in the West, then it must also be a response to enforced modernity in the African postcolonial context. In mounting this argument, I have shown how Mabanckou employs strategies associated with Western postmodernist writing in order to interrogate the effects of Western modernity and its African version. Accordingly, the four core chapters of this thesis have demonstrated not only the possibility of a postcolonial postmodernism, but also its socio-political relevance and implications in the African context.

I have also argued that Mabanckou's Afrodiasporic status as a French-Congolese citizen renders him a culturally glocalised writer who localises Western literary traditions and their socio-political contexts. The implication of this aesthetic glocalisation is that he inflects postmodernism differently from Western writers, for, as an African postcolonial writer, his conception of a literary tradition is based on different experiences of and responses to modernity. As such, Mabanckou necessarily invests his writing with a politics of decolonisation which pointedly diverges from the politics of disillusionment and despair that characterises Western postmodernist writing. What the reader encounters in his writing, then, is the deployment of typical Western postmodernist techniques in the postcolonial context in order to address African socio-political realities which are products of the colonial encounter.

Proceeding from this premise, I part company with theoretical positions that do not acknowledge the socio-political relevance of postmodernism to African studies, especially the argument that this Western literary tradition is apolitical in nature. As I have amply demonstrated

throughout the thesis, Western and African postmodernism share the political impulse of problematising Western modernity from within its liberal humanist and global capitalist assumptions and conventions, even if the former's politics of disillusionment and despair lacks the latter's decolonisation agenda. It is for this reason that Tejumola Olaniyan calls upon African scholars to engage with postmodernist thought because, despite its Western provenance, it is relevant to the critique of the continent's socio-political realities (*Postmodernism, Postcoloniality and African Studies* 51-2). This engagement with a postmodernist aesthetic is what the reader indeed witnesses at both formal and thematic levels in Mabanckou's writing.

Another related contention of this study is that, while his writing evinces formal characteristics of Anglo-American postmodernism, Mabanckou is politically ambivalent towards both Western and African modernity. In other words, since he is an inheritor of both French and Congolese cultures, his relationship with the West and Africa is one of ambivalent identification and critique. As with Western postmodernism, which calls into question modernity from within because it cannot escape coexistence with and complicity in its liberal humanist assumptions and conventions, Mabanckou's postcolonial postmodernism simultaneously installs and subverts the effects of enforced modernity in the African context. Not surprisingly, then, his novels criticise both the West and Africa for their shared contribution to various problems, such as the slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and global capitalism.

Importantly, in this regard, Mabanckou's writing presents both formal and thematic continuities and discontinuities within the broader context of African postcolonial literature. Drawing on Gerald Gaylard, Simon Gikandi, Evan Mwangi, and Kwame Anthony Appiah, the study has suggested that the African novel has undergone considerable transition from the time of the first generation of African writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wole

Soyinka, among others. I have shown that these writers inherited realism and modernism from colonial education and transculturated the two Western traditions into social realism in order to serve the political functions of nationalism and decolonisation from the 1950s up to the 1980s. Since then, though, African fiction has been characterised by different forms of postrealist genres like gothic fiction, science fiction, romance, fantasy, horror, postmodernist fiction, and magical realism.

By implication, then, if form cannot be understood without its content, the formal transition of African literature suggests a corresponding thematic shift. Significantly, in this regard, I have drawn on Appiah's contention that early African novels were realist legitimations of nationalism, but, from the late 1960s onwards, they became postrealist, since the betrayal of independence promises by the first generation of the continent's leaders had engendered disillusionment. The study has demonstrated that such postrealist novels do not only reject and subvert conventions of social realism, but also deploy metafictional strategies that critique both Western imperialism and the complicity of African leaders in the form of dictatorship and corruption. Differently put, contemporary African writing evinces a critical flexibility, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls an auto-critical impulse that subjects both Western and postcolonial worlds to constant interrogation (xv), which is exactly what characterises Mabanckou's novels.

As has been demonstrated in this thesis, Mabanckou continues the decolonising politics of the first generation of African writers, but does so auto-critically by exposing the contribution of Africans to enforced modernity. So, for example, chapter one examined how Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* incorporate self-reflexive strategies of metalepsis and intertextuality in order to perform a postmodernist critique of the representational claims of colonialism, especially its Eurocentric history. Through his surrogate authors, Mabanckou has shown that both

Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses are racially inflected and oppositional in nature since they are premised on a binarist logic. In simultaneously inscribing and undermining the racial assumptions and contradictions of these opposing discourses, Mabanckou exposes their ideological constructedness and, by extension, their mimetic illusions.

My argument has been that, if read from a postrealist perspective, *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* suggest that although both Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses are necessary expressions of history, they are nonetheless not objective and natural. Moreover, to deny the objectivity and naturalness of Eurocentric and Afrocentric histories is not to deny their existence. In this regard, Linda Hutcheon argues that:

> in literary and art critical circles there is still a tendency to see postmodern theory and practice either as simply replacing representation with the idea of textuality or as denying our intricate involvement with representation, even though much postmodern thought has disputed this tendency […]. By making representation into an issue again postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation, about its transparency and common-sense naturalness. (*Politics of Postmodernism* 31-2)

Indeed, my claim in this study has been that if postmodernism is a critique of the mimetic assumptions and conventions of Western culture, then it must also be an interrogation of the representational claims of African postcolonial culture. The inference here is that self-reflexivity in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* serves a political function that goes beyond the metaleptic and intertextual preoccupations of the two novels. More importantly, Mabanckou's metafictional rewriting of Western and African histories problematises the consistent description of postcolonial postmodernism as ahistorical, for such a sweeping generalisation tends to unquestioningly overlook what Ahmed Gamal describes as the decolonising agendas and theories

of agency that characterise Third World politics (1). Indeed, as with postmodernist fiction which, in Hutcheon's words, does not deny the existence of history, but exposes how context facilitates the conscious composition of events into a narrative (*Politics of Postmodernism* 66-67), *Broken Glass* and *Black Bazaar* expose how Western imperialism necessitated the construction of Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses.

The second chapter of this study explored how Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* and *African Psycho* draw on the postmodernist notion of fragmented subjectivity in order to critique the psychological effects of modern urban conditions in France and postcolonial Congo. Focusing on the fragmentation of Massala-Massala and Grégoire, I have demonstrated that these protagonists display and perform conflicting identities, and so their ontological status and, indeed, their self-perception is always in a process of perpetual deferment, uncertainty, instability, and indeterminacy. I have also shown that this recurring process of fragmentation undermines their agency, since they repeatedly fail to act against the very conditions that constitute their identity. That is, the more they commit crime in order to gain a coherent sense of self the more they fragment themselves even beyond their own self-recognition.

I have also shown that Mabanckou's postmodernist presentation of the fragmentation of his protagonists is politically significant in that it problematises binarist notions of both Western and postcolonial identities. As Simon During argues, postcolonial subjects are characterised by the need to create an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images, which were constructed to prevent the possibility of such an identity (33, 43). While During's argument perceptively captures the disorienting effects of Western imperialism on postcolonial identity, he overlooks the existential entanglement and contamination that accompanies this violent cultural encounter. My argument in this chapter has been that Mabanckou's *Blue White*

Red and *African Psycho* evince the ontological complexity of the colonial encounter, especially how it initiated socio-political conditions that preclude the construction of a unitary sense of identity.

In this regard, I have also argued that Mabanckou's writing accords with Simon Malpas's contention that postmodernism is based on a continuous renegotiation and disruption of subjective identity because it is a historically mutable structure that remains open to redefinition and transformation (79). My contention has been that Mabanckou, as an African postmodernist writer, does not deny the need for a postcolonial identity, but rather suggests that such an identity cannot be constructed in essentialist terms and cannot therefore be stable because it is already implicated in historically mutable forces, which emanate from the intersection of African and Western cultures. In making this point, my study is largely in agreement with Appiah who, drawing on Achebe, argues that African identity is still in the making because it is always shifting among other salient modes of being in response to equally changing economic, political, and cultural forces (173, 177-78). This, in fact, is what Albert J. Paolini refers to as the nonessentialist and nonauthentic reading of African identity and culture (20).

In chapter three, I have built on this concept of glocalised identity by arguing that Mabanckou employs experimental techniques of run-on commas and concrete prose in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* as a postmodernist critique of linguistic imperialism. In mounting this argument, I have indicated that run-on commas, blank spaces, and block paragraphs infuse French (and English) with a disruptive Congolese vernacular accent, which ultimately undermines their colonial imposition. The suggestion here is that although *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* were originally written in French and then translated into English, they still evince the destabilising interference of the fast-paced accent of Congolese languages. The

ontological effect of this recurring tension is that, even though the reader sees French (and English) words on the pages, he or she constantly perceives the fictional projection of the phonetic and syntactical traces of Congolese languages.

As outlined in the chapter, Mabanckou's postmodernist contribution to the language debate in African literature is politically and theoretically significant. This study has shown that there are two opposing views, one for and the other against European languages, and that Mabanckou straddles both. In adopting both views in his narrative experimentation without necessarily being reducible to either of them, Mabanckou shows a postmodernist ambivalence towards European languages.

Significantly, in this regard, the situatedness of Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* in the liminal space between European and Congolese languages demonstrates the modern linguistic attitude of African postcolonial writers. As F. Abiola Irele argues in *The African Imagination*, contemporary African literature is characterised by an ambivalent relationship to the European conventions of literate expression and the indigenous tradition of orality:

> This disjunction exists between Africa, considered as comprehensive reference for and image of experience, and European languages and the literary conventions associated with them. The result is that the tensions and ambiguities that mark the situation of African writers are produced within the very form of expression they are obliged to deploy. The question then becomes how to create a formal harmony between expression and the objective reference of that expression. Formulated differently, the problem of the African writer employing a European language is *how to write an oral culture*. (16; emphasis in original)

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Mabanckou deals with this linguistic problem by using and abusing the literary and grammatical conventions of French (and English) in ways that simultaneously install and undermine literacy and orality. Quite simply, what the reader gets in the end is a glocalised version of the two traditions.

Finally, in chapter four, I revisit the concept of self-reflexivity, but from the perspective of Mabanckou's autobiographical writing in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses*. I have argued that, in the three novels, Mabanckou, through his surrogate authors, critiques various disruptive effects of Western modernity on both his fictional and real life, as well as on the collective lives of his extended family and friends. I have also contended that Mabanckou uses different self-reflexive strategies not merely as postmodernist exercises in blurring the ontological boundary between real life and fiction, or to romanticise his past and present, but rather to problematise the impact of colonial education, poverty, crime, dictatorship, corruption, capitalism, and racism on the interpersonal relationships from which his identity proceeds.

As in other chapters, Mabanckou's autobiographical writing in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, and *Black Moses* contributes theoretically and politically to African postcolonial literature. As I have shown, the form of the three novels, on a theoretical level, diverges quite noticeably from that of their African predecessors because Mabanckou incorporates self-reflexive techniques that are associated with Western postmodernist writing. Instead of employing realist strategies, which do not acknowledge their narrative constructedness, he draws attention to the writing process itself. In other words, Mabanckou simultaneously continues and departs from the self-writing tradition pioneered by the first generation of African writers. Politically, metafictional devices confer a rare critical flexibility on the three novels, which allows

him to both identify with and criticise his parents, his extended family, his fellow Afrodiasporic subjects, his French and American asylum providers, and even himself.

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